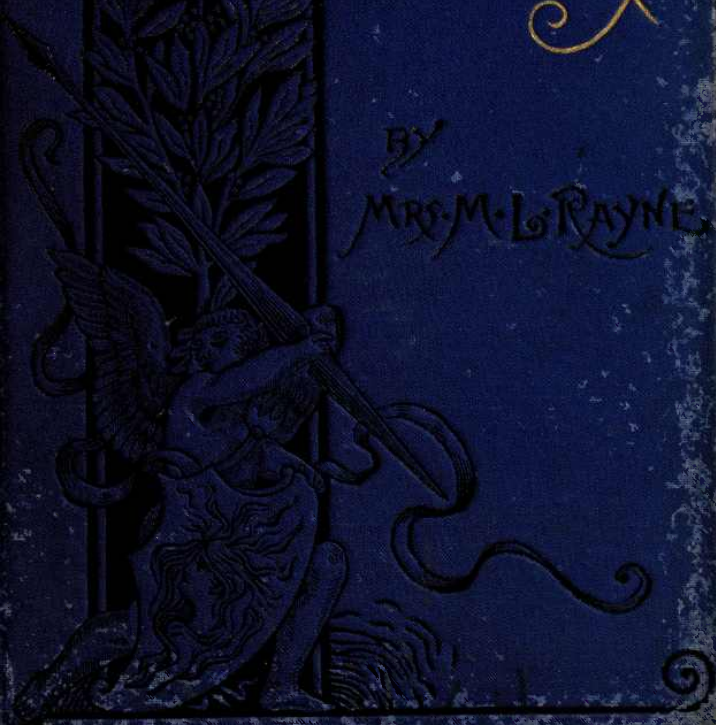
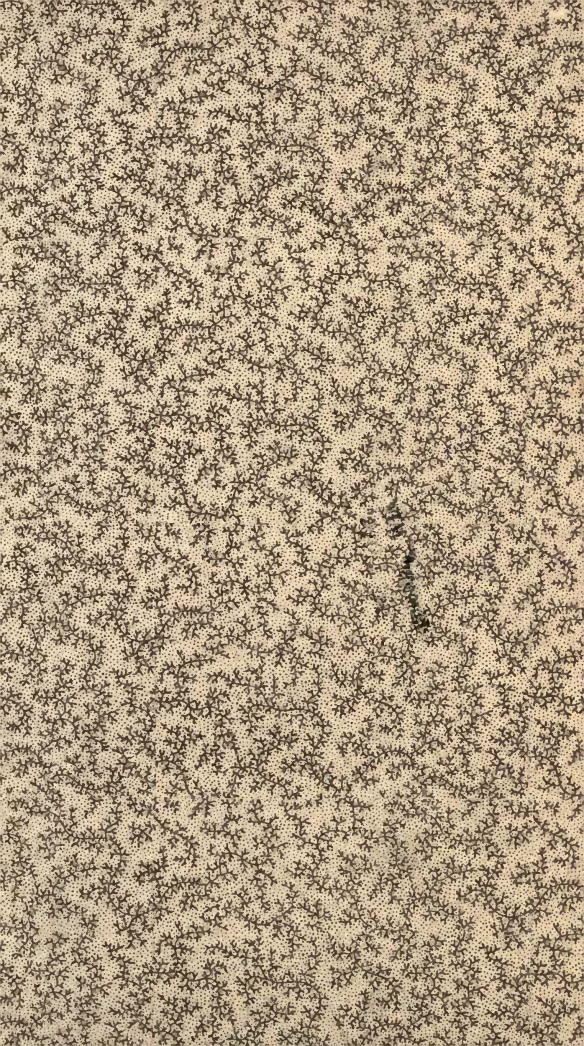


Her DESPERATE VICTORY

BY
MRS. M. L. RAYNE.







BERTRAND SMITHS
BOOK STORE
140 PACIFIC AVENUE
LONG BEACH, CALIF



“She has come to poison me !” (Page 198.)

(Frontispiece.)

Her Desperate Victory.

BY MRS. M. L. RAYNE,

AUTHOR OF "AGAINST FATE," "WHAT CAN A WOMAN DO?" ETC.

"A novel is the world's truth with a beautiful woman walking through it."—PROFESSOR DAVID SWING.

ILLUSTRATED BY T. W. WILLIAMS.

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Her Desperate Victory.

CHAPTER I.

MANIFEST DESTINY.

It was the first week of vacation at the Princeton Seminary, and the young lady pupils of that far-famed institution had nearly all returned to their homes, some with the expectation of resuming their studies at the next term, others to take their places in the world for whose arduous duties they were supposed to be fully equipped. Those bore with them, as proud trophies of success, the small roll of parchment which must decide their educational status, and the precious many-adjectived, laboriously-composed essay or theme, as it was usually designated, which had been held with trembling white-gloved fingers and read with rhetorical effect before a

hushed and admiring audience. The Princeton Seminary belonged to the ringletted and pantaletted period. It had nothing to do with the higher education of woman. Its pupils were young ladies, classed and specified as such. They were taught a Chesterfieldian politeness and the most popular rules of deportment; how to courtesy with ease, leave and enter a room properly, and utter graceful nothings in a pretty, lisping speech that was etymologically correct. They also learned to recite in French, write a fine Italian hand, play the piano-forte, and sing sweetly and plaintively some tender strain of sentiment, such as that much-loved madrigal, "The moon is low down in the sky, Lorena," These pleasant studies were considered of more importance than history or mathematics. They were the classics of the age when the one leading idea of a finished education was to fit young ladies for the moderate triumphs of drawing-room life, and the ultima thule of safe and prosperous marriage. Occasionally a girl who thought,

asked for a wider range of knowledge, but unless she was preparing to marry a missionary, or become a teacher herself, she was regarded as strong-minded, and, in consequence, unwomanly. The graduates of that school are all familiar pictures of the past. Good gentlewomen, endowed with many foolish ideas and useless accomplishments, but utterly unfit to battle with the strong, rough winds and waves of adverse circumstance. Helplessly dependent on others until that heroic element which lies dormant in the weakest female character arose in self-assertion and saved its possessor from total shipwreck, then the peurile lessons of a school of accomplishments were unlearned and some practical study caught at, as a shipwrecked man catches at the saving plank.

Far be it from me to deride the system of education taught in those days. It was sufficient unto the day and generation with the majority of its pupils,—the women who, endowed with a mediocrity of accomplishments, never felt the necessity of a deeper

C. M. Cole,
Appleton, Wis.

knowledge. The women who since then have worked in the ranks as toilers for daily bread needed a stronger educational diet, and out of their necessities the broad scope which to-day includes a sexless horizon has grown and widened. The girls who excel in piano-playing and embroidery to-day are professionals, who turn to good account the accomplishments of the past. The sentimental nature is made subservient to the practical. Mathematics have crowded out worsted-work from the woman's college. Poetry and potatoes, form a harmonious partnership of beauty and utility, and the Lydia Languishes of society exist only in nomenclature. The change is a radical and wholesome one, as if a diet of cream-cakes had been exchanged for one of bread-and-butter.

There were three members of the graduating class who still remained at the Princeton Seminary, and these were now in the throes of packing. They were no longer school-girls, but, according to the formulas of the day, finished young ladies. Two of

these were seated in a much-littered room, gazing despondently upon several dismembered trunks that stood about with yawning lids and resembled anything but arks of safety to their chaotic population on the floor. Lace shawls and white dresses of fluffy muslin, kid slippers and ribbon sashes, white gloves and withered bouquets, were flung together in a hopeless abandon of disorder. There were two narrow dormitory beds in the room, and on each of these a weary young person reclined in a hurried negligee in keeping with the surroundings.

"Where is Beatrice?" asked the smaller and younger of the two, a petite girl with a great profusion of fair hair and a pair of appealing blue eyes.

"I have called her. She will be here presently," answered the other, a spare, dark girl, with a wearied look that was habitual to her.

"Oh dear!" exclaimed the first speaker, who rejoiced in the pretty name of Alma. "Who was it remarked that 'Order is

heaven's first law,' or something to that effect?"

"Have you forgotten your Pope so soon, Alma?" asked her friend, whose name was Adelaide. She was fanning herself lazily with a lace handkerchief drawn at random from the heap on the floor.

"Was it Pope?" inquired Alma, doubling a pillow and fitting it into the small of her back, with a heroic effort to be comfortable. "Well, you know, Adelaide, I was always famous for forgetting all I should remember, and remembering all I should forget. I know it was Pope who said, 'the proper study of mankind is man.' He should have said of womankind. I intend to act upon his advice immediately if not sooner."

"He meant man in the abstract," corrected Adelaide. "A classification which includes women also."

"I presume so," responded Alma; "but in the abstract, or concrete, or, like oysters, in the raw, I shall make him my study, dear, until I discover my own peculiar specimen. Then I shall subjugate and preserve him as a

curio worthy the attention of a lifetime. Oh, there comes Beatrice! Enter, Lady Macbeth!

“ The thane of Fife
Had a wife—
Where is she now ?”

The new comer was a handsome, stately girl, with a beautiful, generous face, that wore a pleasant smile which bespoke a disciplined nature. She was slightly older than the other two, and advanced with a gentle air of sisterly seniority. Accepting the role of Lady Macbeth as pleasantly as it was offered, she held up her hands and rubbed them tragically, observing in dramatic tones, as she saw the heap of unconquered packing on the floor, “ Infirm of purpose! Give me the dagger !”

“ Bee, darling,” drawled Alma, lazily, “ won’t you come over and help us ?”

She was the only one who had ever called the dignified Beatrice by this pet name.

“ The cry of Macedonia,” responded Beatrice, “ heard in all ages and every land, dear, as Miss Richards would say. ‘ Order

gave each thing to men,' now why not to women? You could never create a world out of this chaos unless you chose a system. Here are silk stockings stuffed into the crown of a Dunstable bonnet. A Sontag coquetting with a Garibaldi. Oh, girls, is this the outcome of all good Miss Richards' faithful teaching? Only confusion and disorder?"

"Don't lecture us, dear Lady Macbeth," besought Adelaide. "What we need just now is assistance rather than advice. As the situation appears just now it's 'a' a muddle.'"

"We ought to have a maid," observed the pretty Alma, swinging a small, slippered foot with unnecessary violence, and not attempting to move. "Mamma packed my trunk when I came, but how she did it is a mystery to me. Adelaide, who packed yours?"

"I did it myself," answered her friend, coolly. "Being the eldest of six children and the daughter of a clergyman, I have been compelled to make myself useful on

several occasions in my life. I packed that trunk to come here, but either the trunk has condensed or the contents expanded. I got them all in once, but in such a higgledy-piggledy shape that I was ashamed of it, and dragged them out again. I know the children will all crowd around to see it unpacked, and I don't want them to think that I know less than when I came here. I wonder if anything less vigorous than a pitchfork will reduce that heap on the floor."

"If you will change places with me, Alma, I will show you how to pack a trunk," said Beatrice, "and Adelaide can look on and take lessons at the same time."

"Oh, thank you, Bee, darling," responded Alma, heartily. She was ashamed of her remark about a maid. The only one of the trio who could have afforded such a luxury was the self-helpful Beatrice, who was so prompt to remember the command, "Bear one another's burdens," and hold out a hand to every one who was in need, making her life a perpetual sunshine for others.

"And now to business," said Alma, sliding off the bed. "First——"

"First catch your hare," suggested Beatrice, seating herself deliberately on the vacated couch. "Take all the articles that are identified and place them by the owner's trunk. Mate stockings and gloves; fold neatly, and pack in their respective compartments each after its kind. By systematizing your work in this way you simplify it. Your mountain of difficulties has already become a mole-hill of order."

"Beatrice, you are a Napoleon among women!" exclaimed Adelaide, with admiring energy.

"I hope not. I should be sorry if my plans worked disaster only."

"Well, then, you were born, Hamlet-like, to set the times right and evolve order out of chaos."

"Bee, darling, what a step-mother you would make," suggested Alma.

"Heaven forbid," responded Beatrice, fervently. "I could scarcely be reconciled to life if I thought it held such a dreadful fate

for me. Of all responsibilities that of raising the children of dead mothers must be the most trying. There are few women capable of bringing up their own children properly, even with natural love as a guide. How, then, would they acquit themselves with cold duty as their only inducement?"

"Besides acquiring the odious title of step-mother," remarked Adelaide. "Why could not that word of ill-omen be softened into something more endearing? It has always been used as a bugbear to frighten children with."

"I would suggest second-mother, or motherkin," said Alma.

"I never can remember the time that I did not dread and mistrust the name," continued Beatrice, who grew excited as she talked. "I am not sure that I have not congratulated myself upon being an orphan since my desolate condition forbade the possibility of a step-parent. I remember an old neighbor at home whose second wife raised a whole family of little ones left by his first spouse. She made them such an excellent

mother that they could never have told the difference, yet when she died they buried her off by herself and recorded her name on the family monument so that it read like this:

“Our Father.

Our Mother.

Our Step-mother.

“And I recall an early prejudice caused by reading a weird Scotch ballad in which the two-year-old child of a dead mother cries itself to sleep while the father is receiving congratulations with his bride in the parlors beneath. While the banqueting is at its height a sudden shadow falls upon the company, the lights burn blue, and a plaintive voice is heard crooning the lullaby the dead mother used to sing. It is drowned out with the festal music, and the gaiety is resumed, but the next morning the cradle of the infant is empty and it is never again seen. The inference is that its own mother had borne it away to save it from the neglect of the second wife.”

“What folly,” said Adelaide. “I remem-

ber when a family came to live in our neighborhood who had two children, a boy and girl. We knew that one was the child of a first wife and soon decided which one—the smallest of the two being a delicate boy who was petted and fondled at home, while the larger girl was sent off regularly to school, rain or shine. Of course all the neighbors interested themselves in the movements of this child, who was the slave of the sick and petted one, until they learned that the boy, dwarfed by illness, was the eldest and the step-child. After that they attended to their own affairs.”

“Young ladies,” said a formal voice at the door, as Miss Richards, the principal, appeared there, following her brief rap with simultaneous haste, “you will certainly be late for luncheon. You should have finished your packing last evening.”

“It is nearly accomplished now, Miss Richards,” said Adelaide, who had been careering wildly around the room as she talked, her head enveloped in an empty stocking bag. “Our trunks will be ready

very soon now. Beatrice is helping us pack them."

"Ah! then something may result," said Miss Richards, with approval. "Luncheon at one to-day, young ladies." And the light of her countenance was grimly withdrawn.

"Can you ever remember having luncheon at any other hour in this institution, young ladies?" queried Alma, pertly.

"No," said Adelaide; "I never did." The lid of her trunk was supported upon her head, and her voice sounded cavernous from its hollow depths as she went on talking. "The sun might cease to shine, or the earth to revolve, or the laws of the Medes and Persians change, or Miss Richards forget to send in our bills when due, but never yet has she been known to vary that lunch hour."

"There goes the gong of fate," cried Alma, giving her sunny locks a sudden and brief arrangement. "Never mind disordered hair. What is that to missing our mid-day repast?"

"Alma," remarked Beatrice, gently, "never quarrel with your bread-and-butter."

"It would be utterly useless, Bee, darling, to wage war with anything as strong as the Princeton butter. Besides, I am just on the point of famishing. 'For what we are now about to receive'—it's your turn today, Adelaide."

When they had eaten in prim pedagogic silence Miss Richards took her leave, opining with some discretion that the three would greatly prefer her room to her company upon this last occasion of their school life. And she was right. No sooner had the door closed upon her sloping shoulders and cork-screw curls than they became merry, confidential and convivial over "the cup which cheers, but not inebriates." They drank off their tea with inspired haste, taking care to leave "grounds for complaint" in the bottom of each cup. They clinked their cups solemnly, and each recorded a secret wish, while they turned them around slowly several times. Then the dark-eyed Adelaide recited gravely, as she gazed with mysterious looks into the bottom of her cup:

“Read me my cup of tea,
Sybil of fate.
Tell what it holds for me
Of love or hate.
Unlock with magic key
Life's dream of mystery.

“See ! it is all there—
Love, fortune, ring.
Dark man, woman fair.
Life's a good thing
Lived in the magic bounds
Of a tea-cup's tell-tale grounds.”

“Be a sybil of fate, Adelaide, and tell us our fortunes,” pleaded the pretty Alma.

“Beatrice will think I am too frivolous,” said Adelaide. She loved her older and graver companion, and never practiced upon her any of the mad and merry pranks which made her so popular with the fun-loving members of the school.

“There is a time for nonsense, and this is the time,” answered Beatrice, entering at once into the spirit of the fun. “Here, Adelaide, read my fortune first.”

She handed her cup to the girl, who turned it slowly in her hands, repeating

the usual formula caught from some strolling gypsy.

"There is a letter coming to you that contains a surprise. You are going to take a journey. There is a dark man who loves you, but beware of a fair woman. She will make you trouble. You will be twice married, for there are two rings. There is some trouble,—and—and—" Adelaide hesitated, stopped, and the cup fell from her hand with a crash and lay broken on the floor.

"Oh, Adelaide, you have spoiled her fortune," exclaimed Alma, regretfully.

"Surely that was enough," said Adelaide. "Beatrice does not believe in fortune-telling."

"You did not end with the usual formula, 'live long and be happy,'" said Beatrice, as she picked up the broken cup.

"Are you superstitious, Beatrice?" asked the girl, with some agitation.

"No," answered Beatrice; "and I think I can finish my fortune, which you are afraid to read. It may be superstition or it may be science, but I have had the one

fortune bespoken for me since my birth. Astrologers have consulted the stars and found it there. The Romany has deciphered it in the palm of my hand. Old wives have read it in my tea-cup. Soothsayers predicted it with cards. It is always the same. Twice married; much disappointment; a life that ends short of old age. Now what does it matter, supposing that my life should be of short duration? 'That life is long which answers life's best end.' I may have drained the cup of pleasure or the bowl of sorrow before then, and be content to go. You see, Adelaide, your prophecy does not disturb me. It is too much like the common lot."

"You have given me a chill, with your dismal fortune-telling," cried Alma. "Now listen while I read mine. I won't have any tea-cup oracle, with its rings and misfortunes. I am to marry a dark man, whom I will love very much. He will adore me and give me everything I want. As soon as I begin to fade and grow old I will gracefully wrap the drapery of my

couch about me and lie down to pleasant dreams."

"While I," predicted Adelaide, who had recovered her spirits, "will be content to remain in single blessedness, the useful and beloved old-maid sister, loving and serving, until some fine day I am suddenly missed, having fulfilled all my duties, dried up and blown away."

All then laughed, and sunshine was restored. They chatted sentimentally in girl-fashion, and with arms intertwined took a farewell walk out in the high-boarded, secluded grounds, exchanging little confidences and dreading to say good-by. Beatrice even permitted them to see the face in a certain gold locket she wore round her neck, after the fashion of the day. She alone enjoyed the distinction of having a lover. His was a handsome face—that of a Byronic youth, with tender eyes and a weak mouth, that showed boyish indecision. Alma declared that he was as lovely as a poet. Adelaide said nothing, but wondered at her friend's choice. But she, too, admired

his poetic beauty. Beatrice looked at the youthful face with that all-absorbing love which ennobles its object. To her he was a young god whom she had worshiped ardently since childhood. Alas! she had yet to learn that men are gods in purpose only.

In a few hours the trio of school friends parted—oh! when to meet again? Of their fortunes this may be told: In her early youth, before sorrow had cast one shadow over her sunny life, the fair-haired Alma was called to lie down to pleasant dreams. Adelaide married a missionary teacher, and following the inspired example of the Judsons went out to the Christian fold in distant Burmah. But no tidings ever came of the ship on which she sailed. Whether it stranded on rocky and inhospitable shores, or went down in mid-ocean with all its colors flying, will never be known till the sea gives up its dead. So after all Beatrice was the only one who lived to verify the fortunes so thoughtlessly predicted. And it is with her only of the three that these pages have to do.

CHAPTER II.

A LITERARY WORKSHOP.

One of the popular methods by which a woman can secure an independent income, and at the same time preserve her social status is by furnishing her own ideas and opinions for reading matter in the newspapers or magazines of the day. Literature has for a century offered its advantages to women as indiscriminately as to men. Journalism, however, was slow to adopt her or allow her to enter its narrower and more restricted domain, which was fenced in with jealous care. By stepping over the bars here and there, scaling the fence itself, or making new gates that opened outwardly, she succeeded at last in getting a foothold. Once within, she remained as a worker, goaded and harassed at every step by the conventionalities of the

past. But championed by such women as Margaret Fuller and "Fanny Fern" she has established her right to venture, and her ability to succeed. Less scientific than her brother, she has won a high place in poetry and fiction, and her graceful imagination has lighted the duller work of her profound and philosophical co-laborer. It may be said of her much writing that it lacks solidity and is ephemeral, but if it fills the need of the hour it has its excuse for being. The writings of women are less venomous than those of men. They are nearly always educational, or at least helpful. Few women have written words that dying they would wish to blot.

This brings me to a certain newspaper office of the present time—that of a prominent and prosperous daily journal with a world-wide record—and to the editor-in-chief thereof, who sat, upon this particular occasion, in his daintily furnished private room, engaged in opening the mail for the day, or, at least, such part of it as was addressed to him personally. It was a lux-

ury of labor. First he scanned carefully through his gold-bowed eye-glasses the superscription and the postmark, after the fashion of the dilletante. Then he carefully cut the envelope with a pair of minute office scissors, and if the stamp was a foreign one removed it with a tender regard for some child-collector to whom he had promised it. If the envelope contained "return postage" he dropped that systematically in the place appointed for it. Finally, he drew forth the manuscript, written pathetically often, in a woman's hand, and glanced over it with a practiced eye. No frown corrugated his handsome brow as he read, and the graceful, drooping mustache hid any expression of his well closed lips. Occasionally he would write a comment with a rapid pencil on the envelope. It was no part of his business to answer these letters himself. The editor of the *Day Star*, that paragon of journalism, had long since graduated from the school of drudgery. Proprietary interests gave him enough to do. He had merely to hand the letters to an assistant

who was familiar with *Day-Star* tactics and was a good penman.

When the editor-in-chief had glanced in this comprehensive manner through each letter he massed them in a formidable pile and said aloud :

“ All these from women who think they have a call to write, and who have no more idea of journalism than a Skye terrier has of hunting foxes.”

Apropos of his illustration I will here interpolate a story of this particular editor, who was very fond of dogs, especially those large and heroic mastiffs which combine great proportions with gentleness and docility. One day a poet, with eye in fine frenzy rolling, called at the office of the *Day Star* and found his way to the private sanctum of its editor. A magnificent St. Bernard accompanied him, and walked familiarly about the art-decorated room, knocking down some cherished knick-knack with every whisk of his enormous tail. The editor waited with silent and unwelcoming mien. The poet began to read some verses

on the death of Cleopatra, while the dog set up a prolonged howl of homesickness as an accompaniment.

"Queen of ancient tragedy!"—bow—wow—wow—wow—ow—w.

"Whose animal is that?" asked the editor, wrathfully.

"Mine, sir," stammered the poet.

"Put him out!" commanded the editor.

The poet seized the dog by the scruff of the neck and dragged him across the editorial carpet, into which the unhappy animal sunk his toe-nails with desperate resistance. There was a brief scuffle on the outside, and then the bump—bump—bump of the dog's ignominious descent as he went down the long flight of stairs, impelled by his owner's boot.

The perspiring and discouraged poet returned to the editor's parlor and resumed the "Death of Cleopatra."

"Queen of ancient tragedy,——"

"Did you kick him?" interjected the editor.

"Y—yes, sir."

"And threw him down stairs?"

"Ye-e-s, sir."

"Then permit me to say that you are a greater brute than the dog. Take your stuff away. I have no use for it."

And the poet who had been guilty of cruelty to animals retired to study over this new enforcement of humanitarian laws.

Another uncommon attribute of goodness this sybarite of editors possessed in his love and reverence for old age. He liked to study it in its picturesque aspect, and he admired and respected it as a masterpiece of Time. He found in it heroic elements, and compared it to a sentinel on the outpost of life, waiting for an honorable discharge from the post of duty. Each old man or old woman he encountered was for the time his father or his mother. To them he gave the unspoiled, boyish side of his character, sunny and radiant with the warmth of his heart.

As this is not a fancy sketch of an ideal situation I hope I may be permitted to linger over it a little. I wish I could repro-



The cup fell from her hand with a crash, (Page 25.)

duce that pretty room, with its esthetic walls and furnishings, its low, broad table, upon which flowers always bloomed, and its silent inmate, to whom so many Miltons—neither mute nor inglorious in their own estimation—brought execrable verse, written upon both sides of the paper.

This warehouse for brain products opened like a façade upon the public hall of the handsome building, which was a monument to the prosperity of the *Day Star* Company, and any one who entered it, at once faced the autocrat editor, who did not allow himself to be in the least disturbed, and whose emotions were kept so well in hand that he did not intimate to the intruder by the movement of a muscle that he was aware of any other presence than his own.

This reticence of observation did not tend to put the literary aspirant at ease, and the result was usually a stammered and incoherent treatise upon the weather, accompanied by a roll of manuscript laid with trembling boldness upon the artistically disposed desk. If the author entered into any defense of the

manuscript the editor encouraged the confidence so flatteringly given, by no look or suggestion, and he received the precious manuscript so tremblingly extended with the cool impassiveness of custom. If his visitor talked he listened patiently as long as he was interested; then he looked at his watch. And the most persistent talker ceased his narrative and backed out as from the presence of royalty.

Then the editor yawned, threw the unopened manuscript into a drawer, turned the key on it and went home. Months, possibly years, afterward it would be taken out, read carefully, and if available—which meant excellent in all points—it was published with a commendatory notice and a generous check sent to the writer, if living—to the heirs if dead.

For out of this fiery furnace the Shadrachs, Meshachs and Abednegoes of literature walked with no smell of fire on their garments. Mine editor knew genuine merit and appreciated it. The pretty sketch, the pen-picture that brought tears to the eyes

with its pathetic touches, the humor that made a whole world laugh, the poem that was a strain of music, how quick he was to appreciate and capture them for the *Day Star*. Reserved and pitiless to the stranger at his gates, he was open and confiding to the friend he elected to serve.

"Hear this," he would say to confidential ears, and then in a rich, sympathetic voice he would read some racy anecdote of southern life, something that told in dialect of the joys and sorrows of some old colored aunty, and his voice would break with laughter, even while his eyes filled with tears.

I know that he believed with old Mr. Weller that women are "rum creeturs," and that much of his stony impassiveness of manner was the result of listening to the experiences of women writers.

"If they only *would* attend to business," he would say, despairingly; "but they come in here with a manuscript, sit down in that rocking-chair, and tell me their whole family histories, and when at last they do go they

always leave an umbrella or a satchel to bring them back again. And the woman who has never written a line expects as much compensation for her first attempt as if she were a professional writer. I advised one disappointed aspirant for literary honors to compare her work with that of authors whom she wished to emulate and see for herself what it lacked. Asked to mention a special author I quoted George Eliot. In a week she returned triumphant to tell me that her friends considered her a much better writer than '*Mr. Eliot.*' "

I have said that this particular editor did not burden himself with the drudgery of his profession. But he wrote many a painstaking letter filled with words of cheer and encouragement to those whose ardor he had dampened with rejected manuscript. He extended a helping hand to many a weak, faltering brother losing heart in the hour of adversity. And when a man went to him with weak complaint that he had been sacrificed to a woman's heartless frivolity he coolly said, "What of it? Many women have been

sacrificed to man's treachery. Why should *you* complain?"

He did not summon his employes to him when he needed them, but went to them. So upon this occasion, when he entered the room where the literary editor had his desk, the two persons seated there looked up and waited his pleasure. He carried with him a small flat package of manuscript and a letter.

"Where is Mr. Harrington, Rob?" he asked, approaching a particularly bright, handsome young fellow seated at a desk.

"In the composing-room, sir."

"I have a letter here I wish him to answer, and this manuscript is to be returned."

A blasé old-young man, with a rose in his button-hole, looked up and said, with a sneer:

"Some sweet girl-graduate in her golden hair, sending her class essay?"

"Cynicism, like smoking, not allowed here, Howland," answered the editor-in-chief. Howland was a valuable man on the paper and his sneers were tolerated. "Rob, ask Mr. Harrington to answer this so that it

will go out to-night. He will find a few suggestions jotted down."

He laid the letter on Rob's desk and returned to his own room. Then he dismissed the matter from his thoughts.

Yet upon that letter hung very important interests.

"Is it the usual scrawl?" inquired Howland, with his accustomed sneer. "Does it have yearnings after the illimitable and divings after the unfathomable? Have her friends insisted that she has genius, etc.? Tell her, Rob, that 'the irony of fate spares not one shining mark.'"

"It is rather peculiar hand-writing," remarked Rob, taking up the manuscript. "Poor young thing—for I know she is young—it is too bad to fill her soul with a divine despair. Howland, what will you wager that she is not both young and fair?"

"Nothing! 'What care I how fair she be, if she be not fair to me.' I have heard that original sentiment before, I imagine."

"Yes," said Rob, "it was marked origi-

nal in the book you took it from, like the boy's poetry. Now listen to this, Howland. It is rather pensive, isn't it?

" 'Just a little nearer to the barrier that is drawn
'Twixt the darkness and the daylight, beyond the pearl-
ing dawn.

Just a little farther from earth's worries and its frets
To the land that has no darkness, the sun that never
sets.' "

" Nothing but rhyme—void and meaningless," said Howland, tipping back his chair and elevating his feet on the desk. " It's all sentimental slop."

" No; it's what might be called heavenly slop," remarked Rob, briefly.

These terms are native to the editorial room, and compose the technical language of the fraternity who would irreverently call one of Tennyson's masterpieces " idi-
otic drivel" if it was set up in the establishment.

" All rot and stuff," continued Mr. Howland, " I would just tell the poor thing so and put her out of her misery. Here is a conundrum: Why are the verses of poor poets always lame?"

"I suppose you expect me to say because they have imperfect feet," answered Rob, quickly. "Try something harder. Here comes Mr. Harrington, just in time to take this off my hands."

The man who entered was greeted with respect. The blasé young man took his feet off the desk and resumed work. The youngster, Rob, looked up and smiled. He was a favorite with the literary editor, and he knew it.

"A letter for you to answer, Mr. Harrington," he said, and laid it on his desk.

"I have not the time, Rob. What is it? A woman's letter and manuscript, no doubt. Has a brute of a husband, poor thing, and wants to earn more money. Probably she is expecting to realize a sum by this time that will pay off the mortgage on her house and something over. Just tell her that her work is more suited to a literary magazine than to a daily paper, etc."

Rob laughed at the volubility of his superior officer, who all this time was struggling out of his office blouse into his street coat.

"I have my orders in marginal notes," he said. "The chief gave it to me because you were not at your post, sir. Now, Mr. Harrington, what name shall I sign? You know it should be your handiwork."

"Let me off this time. Sign any name you please,—mine, per R. W., if you choose. What does it matter?"

"But it might be quite important," said Rob, laughing. "This is a young lady—a southern girl—and if she should not like the subject-matter she may send her big brother with a challenge, and what would poor Rob do then, oh, then?"

"Stop that chattering," snarled Howland, "and send that slush off out of the way. If I had a daughter or sister who persisted in writing such trash and sending it to the newspapers I would wring her neck—yes—cheerfully."

"I don't doubt it, Mr. Howland, not in the least; and it would be a good thing for the girl, too, come to think of it."

"Follow instructions, Rob," said Mr. Har-

rington, pleasantly. "That is a very singular chirography," he added, studying it a moment.

"The instructions are that the writer is to try again."

"Then there must be a mustard-seed of merit in it," answered Mr. Harrington, taking his hat. "I am going out for a short walk, Rob. My brain is cobwebby to-day, I think."

"All right, Mr. Harrington, I will write the letter," said Rob, cheerfully; "and if you will come down to my room to-night I'll make you one of mother's hot lemonades. They're tip-top for brain cobwebs."

Edgar Harrington went out, unconscious that he was in any manner aiding and abetting destiny in forming some of her strange and incongruous plans, which, like the wires of telegraphy, cross and recross, bearing on the unseen current of conflicting lives. He walked rapidly along with no definite aim or object save to fly from himself. A look of unsatisfied longing told of a heart that was at war with itself.

"A millstone and the human heart are driven ever round. If they have nothing else to grind they must themselves be ground."

This grinding of the heart had prematurely whitened the brown curling locks, and drawn tense lines about the decisive mouth, and given a care-worn look to a rather handsome face, which was marred by a shadow of discontent, and, to tell the truth, bore that most legible handwriting of the devil, the seal and stamp of dissipation.

Not present dissipation. It is the story of the past that is always written upon the tell-tale features. Nature avenges herself for the wrongs put upon her by telling her whole story to the world so that he who runs may read. If, as I strongly suspect, it was a woman's hand that first led Edgar Harrington astray, then as a compensating power it was a woman's hand that saved him. He had climbed to the dizzy and unreal heights of pleasure, where a man looking into the awful abysses loses his head. As he was going over the precipice a strong, brave hand was reached out to him, and he was saved.

CHAPTER III.

CLYFFE HOUSE.

Two girls were chatting together in one of the upper rooms of an old southern home—a front room that opened on a latticed veranda, overrun with purple wisteria and Gloire Dijon roses. The house was old and much dilapidated, but with its stately air imposing and grand, even in decay, as one which had seen better days. It would be hard to determine the architectural age to which it belonged under the modern patches that had been inflicted upon it, but it really was an old colonial mansion, and its first owners boasted of Huguenot descent. It was a traditional record that not one member of the family had ever earned a dollar or worked a day. General Washington had been entertained there with his liveried servants and emblazoned coach, and wine had

run as freely as water. In the dining-hall, of feudal proportions, great companies feasted until conviviality had drowned reason. Time had been as nothing to those people. Like the loyal people of Scotland who stopped their clocks when Queen Elizabeth visited them, they did not wish to be reminded of its flight. But those good old days were gone. Successive generations became poorer and weaker. Clyffe House was no longer a hospitable mansion filled with revelers, but a broken-down, mortgaged homestead, with nothing pertaining to it but an impoverished family and an aristocratic record. The master of the house failed to rise one morning, and was found dead, his hand still grasping the only sentinel that stood by his lonely death-bed, his favorite decanter. His familiar and boon companion, when he heard of his comrade's death, blew out his feeble brains, and the queenly daughter, who was the toast of the county and the last of her race, secluded herself in the shut-up house, which was the sole mausoleum of a grand family.

In a year she made a singular marriage. It was all for love and the world well lost. There had been in her father's employ a young law-student, who had gone to the sunny south on account of a threatened difficulty of the lungs. Marie Clyffe had refused some brilliant offers. Money was to her as dross. She had lived a brief era of splendor, through her beauty and position, and society might well be astonished when she married the poor law-student and attempted to resume her sway as its queen. The attempt was a failure. The law-student was given the empty title of judge ere he had ever pleaded a case. He tried to fill a dead man's shoes. Horse races and politics ruined him socially and financially. He drank himself into a sodden state of degradation. His wife, a peevish, faded beauty, died and left him two little girls, as wild and shy as they were pretty. The war had swept away their servants, of whom they possessed a faithful retinue. His weak lungs had prevented the judge from serving in the Union army if he had been inclined

to, which he was not. He loved his country, but he loved his own safety and comfort better, and contrived to stay peaceably at home while opposing factions settled the nation's difficulty with shot and shell. With his two girls, growing up like weeds, and one old servant to act as steward and housekeeper, the judge kept house in the old mansion, and existed after a fashion. He arbitrated a little, drank a good deal, and went shambling about, red-nosed and incoherent, but enjoying a certain distinction as the widower of the late handsome Miss Clyffe. The old bell-crowned hat and long white-seamed coat were familiar to the eyes of all Sparta. Richard Marsden in more prosperous circumstances would have been a less prominent man than he was on this border-land of starvation. Though not an old man the judge was bent and walked with a cane, but his hair and whiskers were still a natural, glossy black. He had never worried enough to turn them white prematurely. His long, white hands were as fine as any lady's, and his voice had a charm

that fascinated those who heard it. A gentle drawl had tempered his northern intonation and given it a musical quality that harmonized well with the melodious dialect of the south, but left it free from the blemishes of local pronunciation. He could not have a higher compliment than to be told, as he often was: "I thoth' foh suah, Jedge, you was bawn in the south."

With all his apparent content there rankled in the heart of Richard Marsden an unhealed wound. In his early youth he had been fondly attached to a beautiful girl whom he had left in his northern home. They were to be married as soon as the young lady had finished her school days and he had established himself in a comfortable law business. He had been true to his love, and not even the blandishment of ex-Governor Clyffe's beautiful daughter had caused him to swerve in his devotion to the absent. No; it was a letter from the girl herself, renouncing him in curt terms and pronouncing her decision final, that changed

his whole life. He wrote to her begging her to tell him why she cast him off, and received a second and more determined refusal, which he was compelled to accept as final. In three weeks he was the husband of Marie Clyffe. But he brooded over his disappointment, and became morose and taciturn. His wife could not complain, for she alone held the key to his secret. All weak characters have one obstinate characteristic. Richard Marsden had loved with all the force of his nature. He might have bartered his integrity to defend that love, but he would not relinquish it. He gave an empty, loveless heart to the fair southern woman, but he made her a tolerable husband, defending his secret at all cost, and taking care that she should never know that he married her from pique. That *he* was fooled, duped and betrayed never occurred to him.

The unloved wife died, and among some relics of dried flowers and yellow laces Richard Marsden found the form of a letter—another and another—copies, re-written

and connected, and finally complete. She had not even cared to destroy the evidences of her guilt, knowing that while she lived they were safe, and when she was dead she could not be punished. Then Richard Marsden took a contemptible revenge. He let her children grow up neglected and uncared for, with never a look or word of love from him. He shut himself up with a friend after his own heart and drank as long as the liquor could be obtained. The only friends the children had was the old colored mammy, who had been their mother's nurse, and the drunken Major, who in the days of her girlhood had been their mother's lover. There was something pathetic in the devotion of these two to the ruined fortunes of the children. Major Krum, the boon companion, had prevailed upon the father to send the eldest girl, Marcia, to a convent for school instruction. She remained there one year, at the end of which time she returned home to recover from a strange illness, induced by over-study, romanticism, a fervor of religious belief, and a severe attack of

insomnia. Cherry, the youngest sister, had pined for her companion, and was rejoiced to have her back with her; but the child scarcely recognized in this emaciated being, with fixed and glassy eyes, the Marcia of the old days when they had romped the fields together. Mammy, distressed and fearful, at once commenced a vigorous task of practical nursing, but nothing could rouse the sick girl from the lethargy which had overtaken her. There were days in which she seemed to resemble her former self, but much of the time was passed in a mental stupor that was as singular as it was incurable. The one doctor at Sparta was called in by the Major, but he could do her no good. So it came to be an established fact that she was an invalid, and Mammy and the Major redoubled their attention and kindness. Cherry was as devoted as they. Wild and shy as a half-breed, totally ignorant, she continued to run about in her picturesque rags and grew lovelier every year. Then the Judge raised a little money, bought himself a new

suit of clothes, and to the astonishment of everybody he went on a visit to his old home in the north, and remained there several months.

CHAPTER IV.

"MAJE."

Major Krum looked after his friend's family while he was absent. That is, he kept actual starvation from the door by the use of the Judge's hounds and gun, and as they were accustomed to a game diet, they had enough to eat. Mrs. Madeira, the rector's excellent wife, who had long tried to befriend the two girls, called often, but Marcia was usually asleep and Cherry could not be found. At last the Major received a letter from the Judge. He read it and immediately went out and got very drunk. Then, charged with a fictitious courage, he set out on a ziz-zag tour to Clyffe House.

It was a perfect day. Cherry sat framed in the purple wisterias balancing herself on the sill of the open window of her sister's sick-room. A man's hat, crushed out of all

shape, was perched on her sunny curls. She was whistling defiantly to a saucy mocker in a tree beneath. Then she descried the Major and waved her old hat in the air.

"There's Maje' comin', Marsh, and he's jes' as reely as he kin be. He ain't bin as bad sence the Jedge went up norf. He's got a letter, Marsh. Kin you see him? Mebbe it's for you. I'm goin' to git it," and the young hoyden escaped by the window, sliding down the worm-eaten pillar of the old veranda with a force that made it shake.

The Major was not so tipsy but that he knew what he was doing. He held the letter up over his head and said, unsteadily:

"Lemme alone! I've got bad news an' I'm going to give it to Miss Marcia myself—my-self—hear that—my-s-e-l-f!"

"Bad noos! 'Taint nuther. I wasn't brung up in the woods to be scart by a owl," responded Cherry.

"Who—who are you a talkin' to, Miss Impudence?" inquired the Major with

drunken gravity. "Who— who do you 'spose I am? Mebbe I'm not th' officer 'n command—hey! I've got bad news—b-a-d n-e-w-s!"

"Popsey dead?" inquired the young lady coolly.

"Didn't I say *bad* news—hey? now go—proceed—advance—halt—fire! No! no! I mean you go and ask Miss—Miss—Marcia if she will see yours truly this s'morn'."

Cherry made another ineffectual snatch at the letter, then proceeded coolly to the house at a pace to suit herself. The Major sat down on the horse-block, pulled out a red bandana handkerchief and mopped his forehead. The world was going round very fast. He tried to reach the trunk of a catalpa tree growing near and nearly lost his balance. The picture he presented was not an agreeable one, albeit it presented the ridiculous side of the vice he was a slave to. In spite of his degradation there was a sort of gentle dignity about the man. The hounds came nosing about him, and kissed his unshaven cheeks with the

mute affection the dog gives to a trusted friend. Cherry hailed him from the window.

"Come up," she called; "Marsh says you may ef you 'have yourself!"

The Major rose solemnly, and lifting his feet very high and putting them down as if they were weighted, entered the house. At the foot of the stairs he halted and leaned confidingly on the balusters. Then he tenderly embraced the newel post. Finally he made an heroic attempt and walked unsteadily up the stairs. At the door of the front room he stopped and consulted the letter.

"Come in, Major!" called a plaintive voice. "Cherry said you had a letter for me."

"'Mornin', Miss Marcia," the Major saluted in military style. "'Mornin'—yes, I have a letter to read to you, and it's got bad news, but I ain't in any hurry to tell it as I know of."

"Is the—is papa—anything happened to him?" asked the sick girl, without any apparent agitation. She was sallow and

spiritless looking, and wrapped in an old cashmere *robe de chambre*, of a palm-leaf pattern, belonging to a past generation, looked anything but pretty or graceful in her capacity of invalid. But to the Major's eyes she was the fairest woman that ever the sun shone on—the fairest but one—and she was dead.

“Bad news 'll keep; it's only good news that can't be told too soon. No, your feyher isn't dead, he is—he is—what are you making faces at, Cherry?” and the Major frowned with mock severity.

“You,” said Cherry. “You look so much like a great big goose, Maje. Never mind the bad news, tell us a story, Maje.”

“Your feyher's been——”

“Oh, nevah mind the Jedge. We doan care nothun 'bout him. Tell us something funny,” piped Cherry.

“I've got to break the news gently. Danged ef I don't wish it was over,” muttered the Major, who was suddenly sobered. “Ever hear of the Widder Kelly?” he asked turning to Cherry.

"Nevah—was she a witch?"

"Major, tell me what you came to say!" commanded the sick girl.

"One moment, Miss Marcia. I must break the news gently. There was a Mr. Kelly employed upon a railroad in this section once, and he was run over by a hand-car and killed, and one of the men was sent up to his house to break the news to his wife.

"Be sure and tell her gently," said the superintendent.

"So the man went on, and when he came to the shanty where Mrs. Kelly was he gave a great knock on the door, and it was opened by the woman herself.

"Does the widow Kelly live here?" he asked, in a kind of faint voice.

"Faith, she doesn't," says the woman.

"You lie!" roars the man; "you're the widow Kelly yourself, and they're bringin' poor Mike's body home on a board"; and your father, the Jedge, has just gone and got married up norf, and he's bringin' your stepmother home!"

"Stepmother!" screamed Cherry.

"Stepmother!" wailed Marcia.

"I said stepmother," answered the Major.

"Know it's an ugly word, but 'taint half as ugly as she'll be, or I lose my guess."

"I'll run away!" threatened Cherry.

"She ain't nevah goin' to be my mother—hateful old thing!"

"What will become of me?" asked Marcia, as she turned pale and rigid, and sunk into one of her strange spells, while Cherry screamed at the top of her voice.

"Wha's de mattah, honey bird? Wha foh your done come up heah, Majah Krum, and raise all dis heah row? Dah, Miss Cherry, you done drowned yoh poh sistah wid all dat campfire. I declah I nevah saw no sich folks nohow. Ise clean discouraged, I is."

"You'll have a new missus to-morrow, Mammy," said the Major, with a trifle of malice.

"Wha he done mean, honey?" asked the old woman, rolling her eyes.

"Oh," screamed Cherry, "Pop's got a new

mother for us all. She'll be your stepmother, too, Mammy; won't she, Marsh?"

"Done gwine ter put anoder wife in bressed Miss Marie's shoes and make her missus heah. Oh, Massa Clyffe! Massa Clyffe! I wuz neber gwine to lebe de ole place wha I raised my missus and de chillun, an' wha my ole man died, and my leetle Pete, and now Ise got to be turned out ter die. Oh, de good Lawd fotch me home safe inter kingdom come afore de strange woman sets her foot inter dis heah house! Oh, de bressed Lawd! I done can't stan' it."

"She will beat me," howled Cherry. "Beulah St. John had a stepmother, and she pulled Beulah's hair and toted her out of the house with a broom."

Marcia roused a little from her dazed state, and looked at them all with her sleepy, indolent eyes, that had an indescribable quality in their dark splendor, as if the eyes of a snake were looking through the perfect orbs of a woman.

"He can bring her here," she said, slowly, "and put her in dear mamma's place, but she

will be nothing to us but an enemy. We will never call her by the precious name of mother."

"Stepmother," cried Cherry, "horrid, cross old thing, I hate yer," and she clinched her hands and made faces at an imaginary foe.

"I'm goin'," said the Major. After conjuring up this scene he shrunk abashed, and his better self recovered its balance at the spirit he had raised. "Oh, I nearly forgot. Here's a package and a letter for you come this mornin' in the northern mail. Didn't know you had any gentlemen correspondents, Miss Marcia."

A warm blush lit up the sallow face of the sick girl. Its rosy glow suffused even the pale hand she extended for the letter. It was a fine, slim hand with delicate fingers, and as the Major extended the letter he took the hand and pressed it to his lips with respectful gallantry. The sick girl drew it away petulantly.

"Oh!" mocked the undaunted Cherry, "Pass 'em round, Maje. Here's mine," and

she held out a chubby fist that was as pink and rosy as her cheeks.

The Major took her at her word, and was about to do her bidding when she dextrously gave his cheek a resounding blow with her saucy knuckles.

"Gad!" said the Major, angrily. "I won't mind seeing that young tiger tamed. I reckon a stepmother that has anything to do with you will suffer enough."

"Good-by, Maje," chirruped the girl, as he passed out. "Come agen when you can't stay s'long."

After he was gone Cherry framed herself in the window in a serene state of animal content. A red-bird was singing on the roof above her, and the low murmur of a lazy mocking-bird issued from the tree near. She was very pretty in her wooden frame, with a song that answered to the bird bubbling on her lips. Her scrappy dress was of some by-gone stuff that might have been used once for curtains; it gave the child a quaint, bizarre effect, but harmonized with the roses and lilies of her

complexion; her bare, round arms clasped above her head were as perfect in shape and color as mortal flesh and blood could well be; health and exercise gave her a radiant bloom. She had learned early to defend herself against aggressions, and was full of rude courage. Mammy, who sat devouring her with loving eyes, thought that she was the image of her dead mother, and stifled a sob at the desecration of that mother's memory. Cherry felt the magnetism of the look and turned, her saucy lips curled in scorn.

"You needn't watch this child," she said, pertly. "I kin take care of my own self, Mammy Monnia. Jest you go and cook a lot of vittles for the folks comin'."

"Ise gwine ter dew dat enyhow, Miss Cherry," said the old woman, meekly. "Ise willin' to take orders from my blessed chillen as Missus gim me when she died; but no strange woman eber goin' to rule ole Mammy. I done go off somewhar jes' to lib all alone by myself."

In a moment the impulsive Cherry was in

the old woman's lap, with her two lovely arms around her neck.

"You jest dare to go away!" she cried, "I'll send the dogs after you in right smart time."

Mammy laughed. "Mebby, yer tink's de houns gwine to tear dis ole carcass? Why, chile, I brung up ebery one of dem dogs jes' like it was a baby! dey aint no good to hunt my old tracks, dem dogs isn't!"

Marcia was reading her letter. Her face was changed; it fairly radiated with excitement.

"Is't good noos?" asked Cherry.

"Yes! they have sent my poems back. One of the editors of the *Day Star* writes such a nice letter; he says my poetry is too good for a daily paper—more suitable for a magazine or weekly, so he returns it with thanks, but I am to try again."

"Goin' to rite a story, Marsh?"

"Not exactly a story, but a sketch—something short—for people to laugh or cry over. The editor's name is Edgar Harrington, and he writes such a kind letter. Oh Cherry,

if I can only put into words the dreams that come into my head while I am lying here! Such beautiful visions as I have. It would make life a different thing to have such an interest."

"And you shall tell me all about 'em, every word, before you send them, cos I can't read them if you do get them printed out."

"Poor child," said Marcia, tenderly. "Why won't you go to school, Cherry, and learn something?"

"Don't want ter," piped Cherry. "Do the birds go to school; or the butterflies? I hate school. I don't want to know nothin'."

"And I'm sure you have your wish," said her sister, with some asperity. "You talk just as Mammy does. It isn't nice to be ignorant, Cherry. People will despise you."

"Let 'em," retorted Cherry; "I won't talk to 'em. They like to hear me sing and see me dance. I won't learn; an' I won't do no work ef I kin help it. I

warn't brung up to be anything but a lady!"

"Brung up—can't you say brought up?"

"Broughten up, then, ef it's enny better. What'd you git by goin' to school, Marsh, a-lyin' there on the bed as white as dough? But thar, honey, you needn't cry. I'll know somethin' some day, an' yer won't be ashamed of me."

"I'm not ashamed of you," sobbed Marcia; "but, oh, Cherry, can't you see that we are not like other girls. We don't know the things they do. We have no accomplishments like them. You are as old as Grace Madeira, and she is a young lady in long dresses ——"

"An' wears a hump on her back, an' a lot of false hair on her head, and walks this way, an' says 'I'm delited to see you' to folks as she despises. Like Grace Madeira? I reckon I ain't; kin she shoot a partridge on the wing or ride a horse bare-back? Didn't I take the prize at the archery shoot—and not half try, neither. I'm just a bang-up girl, ef I don't know

nothin'. And I don't let enny soft sawney of a feller tell me no pack of lies. Here's Mammy with a bite. Woodcock pie. I shot that pair yesterday mo'ning. You'd starve ef it warn't for your know-nothin' sister."

"I believe I should," sighed Marcia, wearily. "Mammy, where did this jelly come from?"

"Made it, honey. De Major he brung de barberries, an' I jest squeezed um juice outen, an' biled it down wid loaf sugar. I usen make it for yoh mamma jes' like dat."

The two sisters ate the daintily cooked meal, while Mammy waited on them with the attentive familiarity which her position justified. Not another word was said of the coming guest—the new mother—and mistress. Marcia was silently brooding over her letter. When the tray was removed she lay back among her pillows and fell asleep, with it clasped firmly in her hand. Cherry not being on the watch while her sister slept, dropped out of the window,

and whistling to her favorite hound went off for a ramble in the fields. Upon the Major and Mammy devolved all the ceremonies of welcoming the bride.

CHAPTER V.

"THE STEPMOTHER'S BREATH."

Judge Marsden and his new wife arrived at their house on the evening of a bright, pleasant day, and alighted wearily from the stage in which they had finished the last twenty-five miles of their journey. There was no one at the gate to meet them, and the house was inhospitably dark and still. The house door stood ajar, however, and as they approached the figure of Major Krum appeared, carrying, with characteristic unsteadiness, a blazing paraffine lamp, that flamed wildly in the strong night breeze.

"Welcome home, Jedge! Welcome home, Mrs. Jedge—I beg pardon—Mrs. Marsden. My dear lady, I am delighted to see you."

The Judge went through a scant ceremony of introduction most ungraciously. He was angry with the Major for being

there, and with Mammy and Cherry for not being there.

"Come in, Beatrice," he said, in a kind, reassuring voice, to the beautiful woman who stood irresolutely on the threshold—our friend Beatrice of long ago. "It is your home, my dear."

The wind, rising into a gale, although the night was clear, swept around the house and in at the open door. It extinguished the light which the Major carried, and went wailing up the staircase like a human thing, rattling the crazy casements of the old house with vindictive force. At the same moment a sharp, querulous voice was heard to ask, complainingly:

"Where does that cold wind come from, Mammy?"

And a second voice responded:

"Bress yoh heart, chile, don't you know? Habn't I done tell you afore when it blow dat way? Dat col' wind, child, dat jes' blow in den, *am de step mother's bref*."

Every word struck with cruel distinctness on the heart of the new mother. She, too,

had heard the foolish old saying. That it could be so wickedly applied was beyond belief.

"Mammy!" called the Judge, angrily, "come down here!"

With much grumbling and a slow, unwieldy step, Mammy — fat and scant of breath—toiled down the stairs, lamp in hand, and with surly respect greeted the master of the house.

"Show Mrs. Marsden to the room you have made ready for her. Mammy, this is your new mistress," said the Judge, who then disappeared with the Major.

The front chamber was decked in a most singular manner for the reception of a bride. It had neither been swept nor dusted. A tattered old silk quilt covered the great four-posted bed. The heavy curtains were ragged and mildewed. The portrait of a beautiful woman in ball attire hung in a tarnished frame on the wall. It was wreathed with fresh flowers and crape. The new wife's heart sank. This, then, was her welcome home! No one should see, though,

that she was cruelly hurt, and she turned to Mammy with a smile.

"Is this—was this lady Judge Marsden's first wife?"

"Dat's my missus," answered Mammy, in a sulky tone.

"You mean that she *was* your mistress," answered Beatrice, gently.

"I nebber hab no oder if I lib a tousan' years!" said the old servant. "She was Massa Clyffe's only chile, an' I nussed her when she was a baby. Dey was powerful rich folkses den."

Beatrice smiled sadly enough.

"Ignorance and superstition," she thought, "are to be combated here. More work given to me to do. Ah me!

"'I slept, and dreamed that life was beauty—
I waked, and found that life was duty.'"

Then she turned to the old woman.

"Where are the two young ladies?" she asked.

"De chilluns? Missuss's young ladies? Dey's in dere own room."

"Then I will go there," said Beatrice, quickly. "Show me the way."

"De lawd's massy, yer ain't agoin' in ter Miss Marsh's room when she doan invitate yer, is yer, Miss Marsden, ma'am?" asked Mammy, with staring eyes.

"Show me the room!" said Beatrice, imperatively.

Mammy backed every inch of the way, and coughed loudly and significantly before she knocked, and finally turned the handle of the door.

There was a flutter of skirts at the window. It was Cherry disappearing into the night.

The pale, haughty face of Marcia was turned to the intruder. An unmistakable gleam of hatred was in the dark eyes.

"I am your new mother," said Beatrice, gently, as she crossed the room. She was dressed in rich and elegant traveling dress, and in spite of her weariness and present dejection looked very handsome and refined.

"You are not my mother," was the chill

ing answer. "You are my father's wife—my mother is dead. Oh Mammy, send her away. She will kill me if you don't."

"Hush! I will go, poor child! Who has poisoned your mind against me? I will teach you yet to love me."

"No—no—no! I hate you," wailed the weak, querulous voice of the sick girl, and with one pitying look Beatrice went away, back to her own room.

Half an hour later a supper was served, to which Beatrice was led by her husband. Major Krum was present, and Cherry had been coaxed and threatened into her usual place, but as soon as the Judge appeared with his new bride the girl rose abruptly and left the room. Beatrice, accustomed to spotless housekeeping, was horrified at the neglected table-service and slack manner of serving the food, but the food itself was above praise. The Maryland snapped biscuit, the broiled woodcock, the corn bread and the sweet-potato pudding were the daintiest of their kind. And not even Beatrice herself could make such coffee as

this old-gold and cream decoction of Mamma's. It cheered and soothed the crushed spirits of the unwelcome mistress of this fantastic house, and when she excused herself to the Major and left the table she felt self-reliant and almost happy again. The Judge remained to have a chat with his old friend. Poor Beatrice! it was a new and sad revelation when at daybreak she awakened from a hurried nap and found that he had at last remembered her—he was lying fully dressed by her side in a drunken sleep. Here was work, indeed, to do. God give her strength to do it, was her one sincere prayer.

But she was a woman of sense, and knew that reforms were not completed in a day. After the shock to her sensibility which the first knowledge of her husband's degradation caused her there came a reaction of love and pity. He must be rescued from this moral bondage of death and incited to deeds of nobler aim. His children must be instructed and taught to love their home. The word seemed a

misnomer applied to this broken down place, which to the brisk mind of the northern woman seemed only to possess the picturesqueness of squalor.

It had all been made right between her and the lover of her youth. He had laid the forged letters in her hand and received hers in return—the letter which the dead woman had written demanding that she renounce him, since he loved another, and they had agreed never again to speak of it. Each had been married and widowed, and neither had given that first best love to those whose lives they had shared. Beatrice had married a man many years older than herself. She had made him a good, true wife, and had been a loving mother to his only child. She had made him happy, but the encouraging voice of duty had been her only reward. To her that had seemed all-sufficient until the lover of her youth came to her with the desire to set himself right, and prove that he had never been recreant to his trust. All her love revived at sight of him. She was a

rich woman and could do as she pleased. And she pleased to marry, afraid to trust to a second wooing. He had spoken of his two girls as children, and mentioned Marcia's singular illness as a temporary effect of over-study. To tell the truth, the Judge cared little for money, and the fact that his wife had a dower did not influence him to hasten the marriage. He wanted love—a companion for his lonely hours—the ideal of his youth. He found all in this grand, accomplished, beautiful woman, and with a man's inconsistency was not deterred from offering himself because he was in impoverished circumstances. If Beatrice had not possessed a dollar he would have concluded that they could live—somehow.

For a few weeks the new wife let everything go on as before. She was simply a boarder in her own house. With her new-found love she wandered about the fields and groves of the lovely southern country, and the two learned all that had happened in those lost years from each other's lips.

Life could not go on very long in this happy, care-free, picnic fashion. The Judge felt with new pride and elation that he must bestir himself in his neglected profession. Beatrice saw the neglect and poverty that ruled everything, and determined with generous hand to remove them. She would buy the old house back into the family, and remove the landmarks of debt. One day she saw Cherry peering at her from behind the vines. The girl looked wild and neglected, and a sudden pity for her stirred the heart of the new wife. Elusive and mocking, she was gone in a moment, but Beatrice felt that it was a call from duty, who, jealous mistress, would have no rival. Then she ended her days of married courtship and entered upon the new role of mistress of the house.

So it happened that a few days after that Judge Marsden went into the great kitchen, which was Mammy's sole and undisputed realm, and solemnly addressed the old turbaned queen :

"Mammy, when Mrs. Marsden comes down here you are to do exactly as she tells

you to, without any complaints or words about it. You understand?"

Mammy folded her bare, black arms over her capacious bosom and looked at the "Jedge." For half a minute she stared boldly and defiantly, then her eyes fell.

"Yes, sah!"

"And you are not to uphold those girls in any disobedience, or help Cherry in any of her pranks. Her mother will look after her now. Understand, eh?"

"Yes, sah!"

The Judge went out and Mammy looked after him with a legible dislike upon her old face.

"Jes' to tink of dat. An' he ain't no Clyffe, and neber was. Ef Mis' Marie cum back she jest turn ober in her grave," reasoned Mammy in her own fashion. Then she began to sing; it was the only way in which she could find relief. She sung the songs of slavery although she had long been a free woman. But it comforted her to sing:

“‘Nobody knows de trouble I seen,
Nobody knows but Jesus.
Nobody knows de trouble I seen;
Nobody knows but Jesus.’”

“De Jedge lookin’ mighty fine. I reckun de new missus been givin’ him de chalk-line ter walk—yah, yah! Dese am mighty changed times foh de Clyffe House,” she soliloquized.

So one morning Beatrice went into the kitchen, determined to begin the work of subjugating the dirt and disorder which had become organized forces by attacking them in their stronghold. Mammy, the picturesque despot of the realm, had no idea of surrendering her power without a struggle, and she met her new mistress in her most aggressive mood. When Mrs. Marsden entered the pantry the old colored woman followed her and defended her territory from the unwelcome invasion with every means at her disposal save that of absolute physical strength. It was not a desirable place to invade. Beatrice, educated to the neat, systematic house-keeping of the north, was astonished and



He held the letter up over his head and said unsteadily :
“ Lemme alone ! I’ve got bad news ! ” (Page 58.)

dismayed at the confusion, waste and disorder that confronted her. She found spices, candle-ends and family silver mixed up with a total disregard of the fitness of things. In a bowl of rare Dresden china she discovered a half-used cake of toilet soap.

"Doan tech dem tings, Missis," implored the old woman, with protruding eyeballs, "dey's sacred, dem is."

"Sacred," echoed Beatrice, "I should think if they were you would take better care of them. This bowl must be kept in the china closet, where it belongs."

"Dat bowl," screamed Mammy, "am de wessel dat my young ladies wus baptized in. It am neber kept nowhere but in dis yeah pantry."

"Oh," said Beatrice, laughing, "if it is a baptismal font we will be careful of it by putting it where it will not be used as a catch-all."

She threw the soap into a receptacle for such things, but in a moment Mammy had pounced upon it and with indignation res-

cued it from such unhallowed company. "Yer doan know," she said, in a tone that implied sympathy for such ignorance, "but dat cake ob soap am de berry las' one my dear Miss Clyffe wus washed wid."

The tears rolled down her dusky cheeks, and she clasped the precious cake of soap to her bosom as if she would protect it with her life.

"Ignorance and superstition, indeed!" commented Beatrice. "No wonder the poor children are half barbarians, educated under this regime. But patience; this is but the prelude to my work—the molehills of difficulty. God give me strength for my task.

'Who sweeps a room as for thy laws
Makes that and th' action fine.'

Success, success at any cost!"

It seemed to Beatrice as if the spirit of the late Mrs. Marsden rose at every step to throw obstacles in her way, but with resolute hand she continued to demolish memorial tablets of soap, nutmegs, and other ingredients of domestic service which

had been appropriated by Mammy as sacred to the memory of her late mistress.

"Dat nutmeg was used las' to grate a leetle into de bery las' mou'ful ob gruel she ebber took," and old Mammy wiped away some genuine tears. "And dat bit ob candle was burnin' de berry night afore she died; and dere's de windin' sheet in de taller; I sated it foh de chillun to hab when dey's ole enuff."

"Poor children!" thought Beatrice. "It is through such legacies they have acquired their inheritance of waywardness and ignorance."

At every step Beatrice found the imprint of a dead woman's hand. The finest linen in the house was rolled into an unsightly wad, and yellow with age and neglect, thrust away among an accumulation of rubbish. She was not unprepared when she approached Mammy on the subject, for the appearance of the household specter.

"It hab nebber bin used," said the old woman, solemnly, "since de day when we funeralized my deah Miss Clyffe."

This was the way in which Mammy referred to her late mistress, the judge's first wife. She had never called her by any but her maiden name.

It took months of patient labor to evolve neatness and system out of organized disorder, but it was finally accomplished, and Beatrice had the satisfaction of seeing the whole house transformed into a place of comfort and respectability, always excepting the Judge's own particular den and the large front room occupied by the sisters. Having subdued to her service the inanimate and temporal things of the household, the new wife turned her attention to the higher spiritual lives wasting in neglect and unthrift like valueless weeds. But here new and unforeseen difficulties threatened her.

CHAPTER VI.

LETTERS AND LETTERS.

“A letter for Miss Marcia!” Major Krum announced one morning in his most pompous manner. The Major was not at present a daily visitor at Clyffe House. He had made several ineffectual trials to convey this same letter to Marcia, but had always been intercepted by Beatrice, and he had gone off deeply chagrined, and with the letter still in his possession.

The fact was, Beatrice had taken a formidable dislike to the suave and inoffensive ex-soldier, whose greatest fault lay in his devotion to his cups, his life in all other respects being singularly blameless. But to her his careless habits and convivial nature were exceedingly distasteful, and made a most unfavorable impression. She was determined to win her husband from all his past bad associations, and she soon gave the

Major to understand that she would not tolerate any lapse into the old dissolute ways. There was no half-way in Beatrice's morality. She had no excuses for aristocratic drunkenness. Because a man came of a good family, and belonged to the patrician walks of life, was reason enough that he should set a higher example to his fellow-men. She had no patience with the social code which permitted a man to drink himself into a state of maudlin imbecility as a tribute to post-prandial conviviality. She plainly intimated to the Major that he could not come and go at will until he mended his ways. She would not permit the two young girls to receive him as they would a brother, even though he was nearly as old as their father. Nor could she make any excuse for the moral turpitude of her husband, who not only welcomed the Major himself, but allowed his daughters the daily influence of his society.

"You cannot see Marcia," said Beatrice, gently, but in an authoritative tone. "I will give her the letter myself."

"If you please, I prefer to give her the letter with my own hands, an' I'm goin' to do it," answered the Major, doggedly.

"Major Krum, we may as well understand each other," said Beatrice, firmly. "I am Richard Marsden's wife, the mistress of his house—and—" her voice faltered—"the mother of his children."

"Stepmother," retorted the Major, in a hateful, mocking tone.

"Very well," answered Beatrice, with a trembling lip. "God grant that I may make a faithful stepmother."

The Major was ashamed and sorry as soon as he had spoken. His naturally good heart prompted him to undo his cruel speech.

"Pardon me," he said, "and forget that I could have been so ungentlemanly. Th' fact is—fact is—I am not quite myself this mornin'."

"No, and you are never quite yourself, Major," responded Beatrice, sorrowfully; "that is what pains and distresses me. You must see that I am determined to win Richard Marsden away from old associa-

tions which have dragged him down; help me and you will win my undying gratitude."

"My deah lady, if I cannot help you, I at least will not hinder you. I need not say that your brave stand for the right is fully appreciated by me. Th' only thing I can promise is that I will not come into your presence again until I am sure of reforming myself, an' you have my word that I will nevalh again tempt your husband to do wrong. You have conquered."

He took her hand, and before she could prevent him, had lifted it respectfully to his lips. A mocking laugh broke the momentary silence, and Cherry stepped in from the window opening on the veranda.

The Major turned away with a look of supreme disgust. It is always the woman who is master of the situation on such occasions. Beatrice turned to Cherry and handed her the letters and package.

"Give these to Marcia," she said, gravely, "and, Cherry, I think you are too large a girl to bound into the house in such a

hoydenish fashion. I would like you to remember this and enter by the door in future."

"And I ain't comin' in anywhere else but at the winder, Mrs. Stepmother," said Cherry, in an impertinent undertone.

She detailed to Marcia with distinct minuteness the scene she had just witnessed between the Major and Beatrice. Marcia listened, and a sullen glow of anger stained her pale cheek with an unpleasant red.

"She has taken papa away from us, and now she will take Maje! Oh Cherry! why couldn't it have all staid as it was before she came."

"H'm, it can't be much worser," retorted Cherry, "even with a stepmother roun'. Here is a letter for you, Marsh. She wouldn't let old Maje bring it up. Wasn't he mad, though!"

Marcia opened the large, flat parcel. It was a letter and a photograph—the picture of a young man, with a proud, sensitive face, and large, earnest eyes.

"Looks jes' like Clarence Stedman, the

feller I daunced with down at the ball," said Cherry.

"It's the editor of the *Day Star*, Edgar Harrington," said Marcia, looking at it with admiring glances. "And such a lovely letter—so kind and good, just as if he was a dear friend I had known all my life. And, Cherry, I am to send them something for every paper, and they will pay me for it, and the money will be mine to do with just as I like."

"Don' see as it'll ever do you enny good, lyin' there sick. Why don' you sit up like other folks, Marsh?"

"How can I? Do you think I lie here because I like it? If I could walk——"

"But you kin," interrupted Cherry. "I seen you."

A strange glow burned in the girl's cheek, and she angrily muttered something about "enchantment." Cherry turned the subject.

"Read yer piece to me, Marsh."

"Call it an article, Cherry. That is what the editor calls such writings."

"Well, read yer arctic, then. It allus

makes me feel kind of all overish, an' jes' as if I woz so happy I wanted to cry to hear them things read outen loud."

Marcia spread out the newspaper with white, trembling hands, and looked fondly at the column where her production had a prominent heading.

"This is called a sketch," she said, looking it over. "Oh, Cherry, it does not seem as if I wrote this. It seems as if a voice whispered it to me, and I took the words down. I go out of myself and roam the streets or fly far off to countries I have never seen, and the voice goes with me. Cherry, what does it mean?"

"Goin' crazy," suggested the practical Cherry.

"No; it is inspiration. I wish I could say genius. Think what a grand thing to be able to write a book that would be read everywhere—something that would instruct and please and help to educate people."

Marcia was either not familiar with Charles Kingsley's verse, or she failed to make any

application of it to her own case. She was not roused to heed the poet's words:

"Be good, dear child, and let who will be clever;
Do noble things—not dream them all day long."

She was only a dreamer—not a real worker.

"Write a love story," suggested Cherry, "like Paul and Virginia did, Marsh."

"They lived it, Cherry, and some one else wrote it. But I—I have had no experience."

Cherry laughed. "There's Maje," she suggested, saucily. "Yer mought call it 'Handed Down,' or, 'From Mother to Daughter.' Say, wouldn't that soun' real kind of splendid?"

"Do you want me to read you my last sketch? Then keep still, Cherry," and Marcia read aloud her latest contribution to the *Day Star*. It was called "No dear face at the window," and recited pathetically the story of a little child who every night watched at the window for her drunken father. It was not until she had died from a cold contracted at her post that he learned

to value her love. Some one wrote him a letter purporting to come from the little one in heaven, and telling him she would watch for him there. He reformed and lived a better life, in expectation of seeing her face at the window of the upper mansion. Marcia read it well, and when she had finished Cherry was sobbing.

"It war jes' too mean to have her die," she exclaimed, dashing off the tears. "Say, Marsh, where did you find all of 'em nice words? Did they grow in yer mind?"

"You forget that I have been to school, and am not such an ignoramus as you are," retorted her sister.

"What's a igneramous—ennything like the other kind of mouse? Ef I hadn't but jes' one little sister what didn't know nothing I guess I wouldn't call her names," sobbed Cherry.

"I wonder if you will ever be anything but a great, overgrown baby," said Marcia.

At that moment there was a light tap on the door, and Beatrice entered. Marcia hurriedly thrust the letter and paper under

her pillow, but in her haste and excitement forgot the photograph. Her stepmother saw it, started, and after looking at it a moment, asked hurriedly:

"How did you obtain this picture?"

Marcia was faint, and could only murmur a few unintelligible words, but she attempted to possess herself of the picture, which Beatrice as quickly removed beyond her reach. Cherry, who stood near, flew at her like a little fury.

"It's Marsh's picture," she shrieked, clutching it with a strength that was irresistible. "There, Marsh, I've got it, an' I'll keep it for yer."

"It is the picture of my—my—a dear friend of mine," said Beatrice, overcome by Cherry's violence.

"And of mine," murmured Marcia, with white lips.

"Where could you have met *him*, Edgar Harrington? Was it while you were at school? I never knew he had visited the south."

Marcia did not answer.

"You will not mind telling me—he is my—my—a very dear friend. How did you obtain this picture? Do you know the original?"

But Marcia's lips did not move to affirm or deny. She had passed into that rigid comatose state which was one of the peculiar features of her singular illness.

"You've tired her to death, stepmother," said Cherry, angrily.

Beatrice retired from the room, much distressed and mystified. At dinner the Judge handed her a letter.

"A manly handwriting," he said, with a laugh. As Beatrice was a business woman he would have surmised that the letter was from some agent of hers if he had thought about it at all.

His wife took the letter, and her face wore a troubled, perplexed look as she opened it.

"Is it good news?" inquired her husband.

"Oh, the letter! I was not thinking of that!" she answered, abstractedly.

She saw her husband regarding her, and the blood slowly mounted to her face.

"What the deuce is she blushing at?" thought Richard Marsden, and the demon of jealousy, that lurks on the threshold of every man's soul, entered in and took possession.

He went out and hunted up the Major, intending to drown his senses in a convivial bout.

But the Major positively refused to drink.

"Hev turned over a new leaf myself, Jedge; find it was kind of ruinin' my health and spoilin' my prospects to be a slave to a bad habit. An' you've got better reasons 'n I hev, Jedge, for lettin' the stuff alone."

"Don't lecture me!" retorted the Judge, fiercely. "I get enough of that at home."

"Well, Jedge, if I had such a wife ——"

"D—n my wife!" answered his friend, savagely.

"Not in my presence, Jedge, ef you please; she's a noble Christian woman, an' I respect her ef her husband doesn't."

"She turned you out of the house," sneered the Judge.

"Not 'zactly, Jedge; I kind of turned myself out through goin' there when I wasn't fit company for man or beast. Look at me now, Jedge—look at me."

The Major inflated his breast till it nearly filled his coat-front, and puffed out his cheek until he resembled a very ancient cherub, and struck a resounding blow upon his manly bosom. The Judge laughed, angry as he was.

"She'll make a man of me. Look on this picture and then on that. An' look at the house, Jedge. An' she'll bring the girls roun' yet. She'll be the makin' of us all."

Richard Marsden went home that night in a much improved temper, and ashamed of his fit of spleen. Beatrice was at the door to welcome him, as usual. How handsome, how good and pure she looked—a woman to be trusted—a woman to adorn the most elegant society, one who could have chosen a husband from among men of mark, and she had given herself to him.

And what had he to offer in return? A home in a tumble-down old house which he did not own, where she was like a dove in the eagle's nest: his young barbarians, who only tormented and distressed her: himself, with his broken-down health and bankrupt estate. There was some sense of shame in the man, and in his heart he acknowledged himself unworthy of her love.

But that letter! It annoyed him more than he cared to own.

"Who did you say your letter was from?" he asked at supper.

"It was from Edgar Harrington."

She did not offer to read it to him or make any further allusion to it.

"Edgar Harrington! Must have been her first husband's brother; I have heard her speak of him," thought the Judge. "What the deuce has he to write to her about, and why cannot she let me see his letter?"

The Judge relapsed into a disagreeable mood, and as he cast his eyes around the table he looked particularly at Cherry, who on this occasion was present. Her

hair was wind-blown, her dress torn and faded, and she presented such a startling contrast to the elegant woman who presided that it aroused his anger against the girl.

"Cherry, what are you rigged out in that rag-tag fashion for? If you have nothing better to wear eat your meals with Marcia."

"Gettin' pertikeler, ain't you?" said the saucy girl. "I reckon stepmother ——"

"Stop that nonsense!" thundered the Judge, raising his hand. "If you speak of your mother do so properly."

"She isn't my mother!" screamed the child, angrily. "My mother is an angel in heaven. I won't have her for my mother. I want my own." And she burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

Beatrice placed her hand upon her heart to stop its tumultuous beating.

"This is dreadful," she said. "Richard, you should never have brought me here. You told me the children would welcome me as their mother, but they have given

me only insult and unkindness. I cannot win them by love, but while I *am* here they must respect me, even if I am not their mother."

"Stepmother!" muttered Cherry, in a hateful aside.

The Judge raised his hand, but his wife stepped quickly between the two.

"Leave the room!" she said to the girl. Cherry had never heard her use that commanding tone. She made an ineffectual attempt to speak, but broke down and rushed away in a whirlwind of passion.

"You have conquered her this time, Beatrice," said the Judge, returning to his supper as if nothing had happened.

"But at what a cost," thought the unhappy stepmother.

CHAPTER VII.

“WE HAVE BEEN FRIENDS TOGETHER.”

As Cherry made her hasty and tumultuous exit from the supper-table, whence she was so peremptorily dismissed by her stepmother, she observed a letter lying on the floor, and picking it up secreted it in her pocket. She thought she recognized it as one she had seen Beatrice reading, and feeling angry and hateful kept it without realizing that she was really committing a crime. When she went to Marcia's room she indignantly related the scene down stairs and ended by throwing the letter contemptuously on the bed.

There Marcia found it when her young sister, overburdened with imaginary wrongs and fancied injuries, was at last sleeping soundly, with occasional passionate sobbings, as if even in sleep she were re-enacting the daily tragedy of her life. Marcia, restless

and unhappy, threw her arms wearily about her, and felt the letter lying where it had been thrown. The writing was unfamiliar, but the address, "Mrs. Richard Marsden," was plain enough, even in the dull light of the night-lamp. Marcia did not intend to read the letter, but, wondering much how it came there she took it out of its envelope and glanced at the first page, wondered more, read a few words and turned to the signature. Startled and surprised at the name written there she then deliberately mastered the contents of a letter that belonged to another woman; read with frowning brow and an ominous glitter in the sullen eyes the following epistle:

"MY BELOVED QUEEN:

"There are good and sufficient reasons why I have denied myself the happy privilege of writing to you of late, but not the one that I fear you may suspect—a lapse into that unhealthy and despondent state where the only outcome of my life seems total failure and from which your dear hand has so often snatched me.

Never, my dearest friend, will you find me unworthy of the love and confidence you have reposed in me, weak and unworthy as I am. When I forget your love, or prove recreant to the trust you have reposed in me, then will I have forgotten all else on earth.

“It has occurred to me that possibly some new trouble menaces you, dear friend. I detect in your precious letters a vein of sadness that should not be there. Dearest and wisest of counselors, let me advise you. Do not sacrifice yourself again in any vicarious atonement for weak, ungrateful humanity. You are a woman made to be loved, worshiped, idolized, and to fill the lives near you with unspeakable happiness. I can never forget all you have been to me. How willingly, gladly would I give up my worthless life could it procure you one hour of happiness. If ever you need me to champion your cause I am always your true knight-errant. Dearest and best of friends, adieu, in the fullest sense of that sweet foreign word. EDGAR HARRINGTON.”

If the letter was a surprise to Marcia the name appended to it was more: it was a shock. And this man had written love-letters to her—Marcia. At least if they were not love-letters they had been so worded as to awaken in her lifeless heart a new passion, of which she had never dreamed. But then the handwriting was entirely different! What did that imply? Could there be two of that name? She thought over it until the stupor which crept over her with the sudden and strange effect of a swift narcotic took possession of her senses, and she fell asleep with the letter in her hand.

Beatrice had worked a complete and radical change in the dilapidated grandeur of Clyffe House. Not by means of paper and paint, or any of the glaring innovations of modern art, but by the aid of a corps of strong-armed workwomen and the best upholstery that could be obtained in Sparta. New, massive furniture of her own replaced what was broken and useless. New hangings took the place of the

worn-out, faded tapestries, and the house was turned into a beautiful, comfortable home so deftly that there were no violent contrasts to mark the change. A pretty room was prepared for Cherry. Mrs. Marsden left the uncomfortable chamber of the sick girl to the last. Marcia was determined that the spirit of progress should not obtain a foothold in her room. She willfully rejected any attempt to refurnish or beautify it. Beatrice, however, conquered at last. When Marcia had cried and worried herself into a fit of illness, and was reduced to an almost comatose state, her father himself carried her into Cherry's pretty room. In the course of twenty-four hours she was back in her own chamber. It was prettily furnished with a dainty suit of rosewood, her mother's picture, handsomely framed, hung at the foot of her bed, and fresh flowers bloomed on a bracket under it. White toilet coverings were arranged with graceful display. All her favorite books were disposed in classified order, and a lovely

couch took the place of the dilapidated rocker in which she spent part of her time. During the process of removal Beatrice discovered the picture and the package of correspondence. But she was too true a woman to take advantage of the helplessness of the sick girl to make any attempt at penetrating the mystery of her correspondence or of the possession of that picture. And so carefully did she refrain from glancing at the package of letters that she did not observe that one was her own, lost, and looked for in every nook and corner without success. She had not yet learned to fear treachery in her own household. An extract from one of her letters to Edgar Harrington will show the state of her feelings at this time :

“The knowledge that I have at least been a benefit to the inanimate part of the household must, I fear, dear friend, be my only compensation. I cannot win a place in the hearts of these girls, who so much need a mother's care. I cannot teach them the necessity of any life higher

than that of the animals—eating and drinking. Dress they utterly ignore. There is a certain charm in their complete ignorance of all social laws and customs—the youngest one, indeed, is like a bird or squirrel of the woods, wild and untamable, but innocent and very beautiful. I wish you could see her, she is such an exquisite creature in her uncivilized dress and childish ways. I could love her very fondly, but cannot get near her, she is so wild and willful. The other sister is a capricious invalid, who, I fancy, is the slave of her own sick fancies. I begin to think that I shall yet have to resort to desperate measures to conquer those unyielding natures. My husband has no knowledge of his children. A superstitious old colored woman has had the sole care of them and has filled their young heads with the most foolish ideas of their own importance. They are ignorant of everything they ought to know. The youngest can neither read nor write. I imagine it will be the most delightful of tasks to teach

her unformed mind if I can once subjugate her fiery spirit. She can be as sweet and docile as a cooing dove to her sister, whom she fairly idolizes. They have imbibed the universal prejudice against the unfortunate stepmother, and a dozen times a day I am reminded of my position. Only yesterday I prepared a delicate cube of toast, which I sent up with a cup of chocolate to the sick-room. The old colored woman took it with apparent pleasure to her young mistress, but I heard her say as she entered :

“ ‘Dere aint enuff to make you sick, honey. It am a stepmother’s piece, suah.’ ”

“ My cheek flushed at the injustice of it. My heart grew sick and faint with hope deferred. I cried out in my disappointment, ‘How long, O Lord, how long must I wait? Cannot this bitter cup pass by!’ Richard does not know how much I am called upon to endure. I will not prejudice his mind against his children or acquaint him with the many pin-pricks of misery which I suffer every day. But I

do not despair. When you come here I hope to meet you with those dear children clinging about me and calling me by the sacred name of mother. The oldest one—Marcia—would be beautiful were she not a confirmed invalid. The other—Cherry—I find her name is a corruption of ‘Cherie,’ the name given to her by her mother—is a wild, lovely creature, who is only half civilized and completely ignorant, not even knowing how to read or write. It would be a delightful task to teach her, but I must first tame her. There are reasons, if they only knew, why those children should smooth the way for me, since their own mother did me a cruel wrong. Pray, Edgar, that I may do my whole duty in this matter. Ever your loving friend,

“BEATRICE.”

“P. S.—Since writing the above I have seen your picture in the possession of Marcia, the sick girl. What does it mean? Am I not worthy of your confidence, my friend? I acknowledge that my curiosity is aroused.

BEATRICE.”

CHAPTER VIII.

SHAMMING.

The social life of Sparta was a varied and conglomerate pattern of different ensemblance of a local type. The minister, his wife and daughter, and their friends, the few families who were wealthy and powerful enough to form an exclusive society of their own, and a sprinkling of official dignitaries, colonels, majors, judges and other titled civilians who had blue blood in their veins, or related to it, were inclined to do as they pleased, and be a law unto themselves. Among these Judge Marsden ranked, enveloped in a mantle of purple glory of the past, which hung about him like a pall. As he had always preferred drinking bouts with Major Krum to invitations to dinners and teas, he had dropped out of the family circle composed of wives and daughters, and when these

hospitalities had been extended to the children they had been ignored in uncivil silence until they ceased to come.

"If they can live 'thout us I reckon we can get along 'thout them," was the formidable edict of dismissal.

The fact was Marcia could not go because she would not humiliate herself by appearing in a quaint costume behind the times, eked out of her mother's wardrobe, and Cherry hated people she did not know—and most of those she did know, too, poor child. They laughed at her queer ways, her patched-out dress, her abrupt motions and her ignorance of quilt-piecing, crochet-work, and even piano playing. The staid housewives of the place considered her a little out of her head—queer—and forbade their own stupid, proper children from associating with her.

When Mrs. Judge Marsden walked into church with her husband and sat in the square pew of the Clyffes, with its faded tapestry, there was a ripple of excitement, for such elegance was new there, and there

was a calm dignity in the handsome, stately figure and well-bred face that compelled both notice and admiration. Beatrice smiled to herself as she saw the attention she attracted, but the smile faded as she heard in a distinct whisper near her :

“She’ll make those children toe the mark.”

And as she passed out between two lines of gazing, critical eyes her cheeks flushed with indignation as the omnipresent word “stepmother” smote her ear.

But she found one friend. It was a small-sized, delicate lady, who went up and held out her hand. “We are so glad to see you here; my husband”—indicating the minister who had just preached—“and I. . This is my daughter Grace. Mr. Madeira has told me about you. May I come and see you?”

“I will be very glad to see you,” said Beatrice, fervently; “and oh, do come soon.”

“This very week,” replied the other; “my daughter is acquainted with—with—your—the young ladies.”



"Tell us something funny," piped Cherry. (Page 61.)

"She is afraid to say 'your daughters,'" thought Beatrice. "All Sparta knows, probably, that they refuse to be conciliated or to regard me as other than a tyrannical stepmother."

And the following week Mrs. Madeira kept her promise and went to call on the Judge's wife.

She was astonished at the change which had taken place in the decayed old mansion, at the neatness and order which made the place respectable and a fit abode for Christian people. She was delighted with the new mistress, who received her in such an easy, friendly fashion, and at the close of a long visit ventured to ask after the two girls, calling them by their given names. "Marcia used to be quite friendly with Grace," she observed.

"What changed the relation?" inquired Beatrice, with interest.

"I could not—that is—Grace did not like to come here to visit her. You must know, dear Mrs. Marsden, that a house with no woman at its head is not the

peace for young girls. The children run wild. They were good girls—no one will ever dispute that—but it is wonderful that they escaped as they have. Marcia was sent away to school and came home ill. She has never been up since, but we think—that is, people here say——”

“What do people say?” asked Beatrice, coldly. To her loyal and honest nature this gossip about her stepdaughters was extremely distasteful, yet she hoped to gain some clue to their natures by which she might be able to benefit them.

“Why, that Marcia is only shamming illness.”

“Shamming!” exclaimed Beatrice. “How unkind! How unjust!”

“I thought so, too, at first, but Mr. Madeira has had much experience as spiritual physician in this place, and he tells me that it is a common occurrence, and that a certain belt of country in this state is noted for its imaginary invalids—people who have no disease, but simply lose their wills and lie abed year in and year out.”

"You astonish me," was all Beatrice could say in response. After a moment's thought she inquired:

"But what of the fainting spells, the long sleep, the want of strength? These are not imaginary disorders."

"All results of that morbid state of mind which exaggerates every disturbed feeling into the proportions of a disease. You would see Marcia use her limbs if there were any sudden necessity,—if the house were on fire, and she could not escape otherwise. It may be that this condition is a disease in itself, but I am sure it is mental and not physical."

A thought flashed through Beatrice's mind like an inspiration.

"Perhaps I may cure her," she said to herself.

"I cannot understand how any one, particularly a young person, can accept the role of an invalid, or be voluntarily immured in the loneliness of a sick-room. Health seems the greatest of all blessings to me," she remarked at last.

"It is surely a disease of the mind; an abnormal condition," said Mrs. Madeira. "I have sometimes thought that possibly Marcia realized that she was different from other girls, and was mortified over it. I am sure, Mrs. Marsden, you will pardon me for speaking of this, but you must see the difference. Knowing the family as we do we can make excuses, but strangers will not do this; they look upon the children as we might upon Indians just learning our modes of civilization."

"Poor children," murmured Beatrice. A divine pity swelled in her heart for the proud, sensitive natures that had been so cruelly misunderstood.

"They shall yet take their places where they belong, in the highest and most cultured society in the land," she said, with dignity.

"I am sure they will," responded her visitor, warmly. "But you have a work to do. Oh, my dear, have courage; be strong; there is a beautiful promise: 'As thy day is shall thy strength be'; lay hold

of that and God will surely give you the victory."

"Amen," answered Beatrice, solemnly; and soon Mrs. Madeira took her leave, and Beatrice went to her room and sat down to think. The more she thought the more perplexed and worried she became, and at last she threw herself on her knees and prayed for help—prayed so long and earnestly that half her burden seemed to slip off, and she rose comforted and strengthened for whatever the future held in store for her.

Then she went directly to Marcia's room. No answer was returned to her knock, so she ventured to enter unbidden. The invalid was sleeping. Letters were clasped in her folded hands and the picture Beatrice had seen before lay upon an open book. The stepmother took it up and regarded it long and lovingly. Then she laid it down with a sigh as the sick girl opened her eyes.

"Will you not try to sit up a little?" Beatrice asked, gently. "It will

give you strength and you will rest better at night."

"Where is Cherry?" asked Marcia, wildly. "Why is she not here? I wish you would leave me alone. Why does not Cherry stay to guard me from intruders?"

"You were guarded," whispered Beatrice, in a low, loving voice. "I, your mother, watched you while you slept."

"You are not my mother," retorted the sick girl, angrily. "My father's wife you may be, but you cannot fill my dear dead mother's place, you are not worthy to ——"

"Hush!" cried Beatrice, rising with dignity and speaking in a commanding tone. "You shall not speak to me with disrespect—you who are false to yourself and unworthy of the regard of man or woman,—you who chose to shelter yourself in a fraudulent weakness and assumed illness. I will no longer encourage your silly, idle fancies or allow you to be treated as a sick child. If you are so devoted to the memory of your mother show yourself worthy of her, and take her place in the household.

When you do this *I* will find a home elsewhere. Since I cannot win your love I will at least demand your respect."

With indignant stateliness the step-mother left the room, and the aroused and frightened girl now felt for the first time the salutary smart of discipline.

That night Cherry did not appear at the supper-table, but this was too common an occurrence to call forth any comment from her father. Besides, the judge was not thinking of his daughter, refractory though she might be.

"Seen Krum lately?" he asked, buttering his hot corn-bread and spreading on it a generous layer of honey.

"The Major? Yes; I saw him a moment yesterday and refused his request to see Marcia. Oh, Richard, do you think Marcia is seriously ill?"

"Seriously—dangerously, do you mean?"
"I guess not," answered the Judge, indifferently.

"I mean," said Beatrice, in a hesitating voice, "do you believe that she is ill at all?"

"Why, Beatrice, what is the matter with you? D' you s'pose Marsh would stay hived up in that room all alone if she wasn't sick, hey?"

"Yes. I do," answered his wife; "and Richard, I believe she is no more sick than you or I are. And I want you to help me if I insist upon getting her up and making her well."

"Gad! that's the stepmother of it," groaned the Judge.

"You have no right to say so," answered Beatrice, warmly. "I cannot ignore my responsibilities here, Richard, as you do yours. I want to be a true mother to those girls—to help them into becoming good and useful women and fulfilling their destinies as valuable members of society. I have a stewardship to account for. My dear husband, how can you regard so lightly your unfulfilled duties?"

"You are so terribly in earnest, Beatrice," said the Judge in an injured tone. "One would think I was the worst father in the world just because I'm not always hetch-

eling, those poor children. Now look hyar, Krum has turned over a new leaf. I don't half like it, eyether. He won't drink, an' ain't half the old man he used to be. But that ain't all. He's gone into real estate. Now where did he get the money? He hasn't a dollar 'n' never had. He says an angel lent it to him! Nice financeerin', that, for angels!"

Beatrice looked red and confused. The Judge regarded her sharply and drew his own conclusions. No more was said upon the subject then.

That night Beatrice could not sleep. The weather was fine and clear, and wrapping herself in a shawl she sat by her window and looked out on the night. Sad thoughts possessed her. The days of her school life came back to her. What great deeds she had planned in the exultant powers of her youth! What had life brought her but trial and disappointment? She thought of a tiny grave among the many in that far-off eastern cemetery, Mount Hope. What a mockery the name was! The little one

resting there had never called her mother. She had only felt the flutter of her birdling's wings when they had made room for it in paradise and given it "angel plumage" there. She remembered how dead her heart had been until quickened by that sweet, mysterious love. There was another grave there. That of the good man to whom she had borne the name of wife, the father of her dear dead baby. Well, she had made him happy. She had done more. She had rescued the old name from the dirt of infamy and saved his boy from that death of the soul that is so terrible. She looked up at the fair southern moon floating in the cloud-flecked blue, and felt comforted. God knew she was trying to do her duty. He was trying her again, but it would all be right by and by. She could hear the sounds of merriment, with which she had nothing to do, from some distant out-door gathering, a barbecue or a wedding among "the hands," and the barking of hounds, disturbed by the tooting of horns and the noise of the fiddler. She heard something

else, too,—the house-door opening softly. Thieves? More likely Cherry returning from forbidden nocturnal rambles, which filled the soul of her new mother with apprehensions. Beatrice looked carefully and saw two shadows, one was Mammy in her cloak and sunbonnet, the other was beyond doubt the rollicking Cherry, dressed in some light, fantastic costume that was but ill-concealed under a careless shawl. They stepped out slowly and softly, and soon disappeared among the trees.

Moved by an impulse she did not wait to investigate, Beatrice threw on some disguising wrappings and hastened after them, determined to see for herself if there was danger to Cherry in those night rambles, or if she were, indeed, safe in Mammy's company. It was less difficult to keep them in sight than it was to prevent herself being seen, and she was thoroughly tired and exhausted when at last they reached their destination, an out-door dance in a place known as "the grove," where the wild and lawless young people of Sparta met by

appointment, protected only by the company of servants who had seen them grow up and would shed their last drop of blood in behalf of the young Master or Missy under their care. Blazing torches illuminated the boarded square set up for a dancing-floor, and an old uncle, with bushy white locks and a good-humored, shrewd black face, sawed a violin, to which the dancers kept time, while from a singular looking mound near a smell of good cooking emanated, several pigs and a 'possum being roasted there with sage and onions, and a bushel or so of apples. Beatrice slipped under the shade of a dwarf oak and watched a scene that was new and most picturesque and attractive to her, albeit she was shivering with fear. She saw the two figures she had followed enter into the waning and fantastic light made by the torches and the moonlight, and other figures come forward and join them. She saw Major Krum take Mammy's arm and lead her with respectful deference to a seat, then place himself at her feet—and then she rubbed her

eyes and looked again. Were there two of Mammy? For this fat, turbaned and beaming apparition carrying a load of dishes with the readiest alacrity, was without any mistake the veritable Mammy of Clyffe House, although her counterpart sat there in the keeping of Major Krum. Beatrice waited and watched with beating pulses. Then she saw the old slat sunbonnet thrown back and the cloak drop away from that other figure. She saw a white hand, a white face, and at the moment when Cherry sprang into the dance and whirled with the others to the wild music, the face and form in Mammy's disguise became clearly visible. Beatrice turned away sick at heart as she recognized Marcia.

CHAPTER IX.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

At a certain distribution of the morning mail in the office of the *Day Star* a letter was handed to Edgar Harrington bearing a southern postmark. He was reading a galley of proof, and took the letter mechanically and without looking at it threw it on the desk before him.

Young Weir, familiarly known heretofore as Rob, was in his place at the desk he occupied, but he was not at work. Paper and pencil were before him, but Rob was occupied with watching the movements of Mr. Harrington at the moment when the mail was distributed. He saw him take the letter which the office boy handed him contrary to his—Rob's—express directions, and now his brain was turned upside down trying to plan a way to possess himself of it. The youth was learning that it is always

"A tangled web we weave
When first we practice to deceive."

Rob's heart beat like a trip-hammer, his cheeks were flushed, and his bright, honest eyes had an ugly, crafty look in them, as he watched his friend in that sly, sinister way. He had stepped out of the straight and narrow path of integrity, "just for fun." Now he would have given much to know that he was safely back in it again.

Mr. Harrington found something to displease him in his proof, and stepped hurriedly into the composing-room to correct it. When he came back his mind reverted to the letter, and he looked for it on his desk. It was gone.

"Rob!"

That voice sounded like a thunder-peal in the guilty ears of the youth in question, but he made no sign of hearing it. Presently there was another call, and this time he turned an innocent and surprised face toward his questioner.

"Did you speak, Mr. Harrington?"

"Yes, Rob. Did you see anything of a letter on my desk?"

"I saw you take one from the boy, sir; perhaps you put it in the desk."

This was tantamount to a denial, and Mr. Harrington at once proceeded to rummage his desk, and not finding it there he retraced his steps to the composing-room in the vain hope that he had dropped the letter there. He was the more anxious because he was expecting a letter he had need of from a distant and cherished friend whose written words of wisdom and good counsel fortified his soul against the daily temptations that assailed his weaker nature. He was disappointed and annoyed.

There was a third person present who had seemed oblivious of all that was going on. This was the gay and debonair Howland, with a fresh jacquemint rose in his button-hole and the same old sneer on his handsome mouth. He looked up at the perplexed face of Edgar Harrington, and asked, indifferently:

"Lost anything, Mr. Harrington?"

"Yes," answered the person addressed; "I have lost a valuable letter."

"Money in it, eh?"

"Is nothing valuable in your eyes but money, Howland?" asked the other man, sadly.

"Nothing. I would sell everybody belonging to me for a goodly share of filthy lucre. My purse is my best friend."

"Then you are poor, indeed," retorted Harrington. "I wish I could find that letter," he continued, regretfully.

"What is the matter with your ears, Rob?" inquired Howland, suddenly. "They are as red as boiled lobsters. Somebody must be talking about you."

"Let them talk," growled Rob, with murder in his heart.

Edgar Harrington looked at the two a moment with sudden suspicion. He had been the victim of misplaced confidence more than once in his life, and for a moment a thought flashed into his mind—could these two be conspiring against him? Nonsense! The boy loved him, he was sure of that. True, he had been obliged to discipline him more than once. He had used

his authority without any right to do so when it was needed, but Rob had thanked him after his fit of petulance and disappointment wore off. In caring for the youth he had found healthy work for himself; they had been like brothers. What could come between them?

I suppose there are indications of a disturbance in the moral atmosphere which are as marked and distinct as the falling barometer in elemental storms. Edgar Harrington felt that something was wrong. When a chill creeps over the head in that eerie, uncanny way that it does sometimes, people who are superstitious say that some one is walking over the spot where your grave will be. A chill passed over Edgar Harrington's heart. What it presaged he did not know.

A few days later he was reading the proof-sheet of the Sunday *Day Star*, when his attention was called to a sketch of a column's length by Hope Glenn.

"A rising writer," said the editor-in-chief. I would like to engage her exclusively for our paper. These pathetic sketches are al-

ways copied extensively by our contemporaries, and although they read so smoothly are difficult to write. I believe you have been corresponding with her. I wish you would state my wish to have her for a regular contributor."

"I?" exclaimed Mr. Harrington, in surprise. I have never written to the lady. I do not even know where she lives or what her real name is. I presume Hope Glenn is her incognito."

"I handed you a letter, Mr. Harrington, some time ago, when she first wrote to us—and a manuscript—and asked you to answer it personally, and I supposed you did so."

The chief spoke severely; he was not accustomed to have his orders trifled with or disobeyed. Edgar Harrington could not for his life recall the incident.

"Her home is in Sparta, Virginia," continued the chief. "And she is evidently a southern girl with a very imaginative mind, and somewhat romantic. But she has a fine appreciation of the powers of pathos and

sorrow, and works up some exquisite pictures into prose-poems."

"Sparta," murmured the surprised Harrington. "Sparta; why, I have a dear friend there. Can it be possible that Hope Glenn is Beatrice. I will write and ask her. But no; I have seen the writing, and it is not that of my Beatrice. It is some stranger. I wonder why I take such an interest in the name. It seems to fix itself in my memory."

"Who is corresponding with Hope Glenn?" asked the senior of the editorial room, looking up from his work.

For a moment there was no answer. Rob's ears blazed, but he did not look up.

"Rob, are you in correspondence with her?" was the next question.

"You—you asked me to write to her," stammered Rob.

"Did I? Well, I am going to write to her myself, now, engaging her as a regular contributor at a liberal price. Just let me have her last letter, will you, Rob? I would like to see the handwriting."

"I haven't got it," mumbled Rob. "I lost it—I mean, it was stolen—no, it—I—" then he broke down hopelessly.

"Rob!" exclaimed his senior, "have you been getting up a flirtation with an unknown lady, who may be a grandmother for all you know of her? I really did give you credit for having a little sense."

What an immense relief to Rob, who felt like a reprieved criminal. "If he only knew," he thought, "that I have been flirting, or whatever he would call it, in his name, what would become of me? How shall I ever get out of this scrape?"

Mr. Harrington pitied Rob's embarrassment so much that he concluded to wait until they were alone before he insisted upon seeing the letters. Then he resumed the proof-sheet, and, as was his frequent custom, read paragraphs aloud.

"I don't see anything so wonderful in those wishy-washy sketches of Hope Glenn's," sneered Howland. "May do for women and children to snivel over, but a man needs a stronger pabulum."

"Women and children are the best critics we have," responded Harrington, warmly; "and a newspaper article that moves either to laughter or tears has fulfilled its mission. Now listen to this brief story—it is a picture; the old man going home to bury his old wife—his refusal to believe her dead—his faith in her immortal youth—the illusion sustained among such every-day relations as the surroundings of a railroad car, and the peaceful finale which unites the two. It is touchingly dramatic, and yet full of actuality. Listen to it." And he read aloud from the paper Hope Glenn's sketch.

CHAPTER X.

WE TWO.

[Written for the *Day Star*.]

"It's we two, and we two; it's we two for aye;
All the world and we two, and heaven be our stay."

It was a gay, rollicking party that boarded the fast express train going east, and as it was late and the cars crowded the noise made by the intruders stirred every one to anger, and their ill-timed mirth and witticisms were received with wrath and indignation. The leader of the gay company was a noisy, robust youth, overflowing with an abundance of animal spirits, and he gave the indignant passengers a saucy rejoinder when they reproved him for disturbing their repose. When he had traversed the entire line of cars without finding a vacant seat he discovered an old man sitting alone, but apparently guarding a reserved place next to him. Rapping the

stranger smartly on the shoulder the presumptuous youth asked if he might sit down by him.

"Eh—eh?" said the old man, in a feeble voice. "We two have those seats. There isn't any room for you."

The young fellow sauntered back to find his friends all provided for, and after strolling through the baggage and smoking-car he returned and observed that the seat by the old man was still vacant. The aged passenger seemed to be dozing, but he responded feebly to the energetic touch of the youth.

"Look here," said the young man, "let me have that seat. You haven't any one with you."

"Hush-sh!" answered the other, smiling; "you'll frighten her away. Can't you see her sittin' there a' smilin', with her long, pretty curls, and with the white dress on that she was married in? Mebbe it was a fancy, but I could ha' touched her before you come—but no, no, she's in there, an' I'm—we two hev lived together these fifty

years an' more; it's hard to be separated now."

The young man had seated himself, and he paid no attention to the old man's maundering talk, till he heard him saying softly over and over: "Katy, my Katy; Katy, darlin'!"

At that he listened, for Katy was the name of the sweet-faced, blue-eyed girl he loved, and even now he was on his way to make her his wife.

"Was she your wife?" he asked, with more respect in his voice; nor could he have told why he used the past tense as he did.

"My wife, my love, my bride," was the almost incoherent answer. "Oh! it was a hard world, but we traveled it together. I never had a pleasure that Katy didn't share it with me; nor a sorrow that she didn't help me bear. I wish you could have seen her, young man. She was as straight as a young sapling and as fair in the face as a little child; her hair was the color of the buttercups in the meadow. I'd take you out yonder to see her if

they'd let me, but they wouldn't. They say she's changed—she never changed in my eyes—though her hair turned snow white like the blossom of the magnolia. Then I knew she was ripenin' for glory. There never was any but we two. God didn't send any children to bind our hearts or break them. It's cold here," and he sunk back and shivered.

"I wish I could think so," answered the youth, yawning, and feeling life and strength in every throb of his riotous blood. "Are you going east?" he continued, for want of something else to say.

"Yes, an' it's a long journey. I'm goin' clear back to the sunrise—back to the old home in Maine. There won't be a soul I knew a livin' but Katy. She hankered after the old buryin'-ground where her folks lay. Say," as the conductor of the train passed along, "is she all right, out there alone?"

"She's all right," said the conductor, swinging his lantern. "There ain't nuthin' as will disturb her, I reckon."

"She is with her Lord," responded the old man, solemnly; "with Him she loved, and served all the days of her life. I s'pose she ain't missed me or thought of me onc't, but it would about break my heart if I thought heaven's glory could make her forget—if we two couldn't go hand in hand there as we have here. Dear, dear, it wouldn't seem a bit like heaven 'less Katy was glad to see me."

The young traveler fell asleep and walked with his beloved in the fair bower of love's young dream in the land of sleep. The old man gathered his feeble limbs together, and he, too, slept, but his lips moved, and broken, incoherent sentences fell on the ears of those about him. He, too, was walking in dreams with his beloved, but it was in the company of angels. He babbled of still waters and green pastures; he sung of golden streets and gates of pearl; of the beauties and the mysteries of the many mansions; of the peace that floweth as a river; he held her small, soft hand in his and called up the love-

light in her beautiful eyes, and played with her yellow hair:

“Like a laverock in the lift, sing, O bonny bride;

It's we two, and we two, happy side by side.”

And all the time the train went on, flying through the night, and out in the baggage-car an old, old woman, wan and wrinkled, lay peacefully in her coffin, her veined and withered hands crossed quietly over a heart that was at rest, and that was all that was mortal of the old man's Katy darling.

When the young traveler awoke in the bright light of early day he stretched his cramped limbs and felt like a giant refreshed with wine, and out of his strength and happiness he gave the old man at his side a glad “Good-morning.” But when getting no response he turned to look at him, he saw that he had reached the new sunrise—the morning that has never any noon.

“It's we two, it's we two, while the world's away,

Sitting by the golden sheaves on our wedding-day.”

When Harrington had finished Howland

was gone out of the room, and Rob sat at his desk the picture of despair.

"Now, Rob," said his senior, "let me have those letters."

"No, sir!" answered the young man, in a determined tone; "those letters are mine."

"Do you mean that your correspondence with Miss—Hope Glenn—or whatever the lady's name is—has been of a confidential and personal nature?"

"That is just what I mean, sir," answered Rob, wiping the cold dew of self-sacrifice from his beardless cheek. "I am not the man," he continued, in an inflated tone of importance, "to betray the trust reposed in me by a woman."

"Live up to that, Rob," said the senior, gently. "And now, since you will not give me a clue to the lady's character or position by a glimpse at her writing, I must do the best I can without it."

"Mr. Harrington," began Rob, in a tone of expostulation, "don't write to her at all. Let me say what you would write. I promise to give it word for word."

"No, my boy; orders must be obeyed, and this business has been entrusted to me. But what difference can it make to you? Are you jealous? If you wish you can read the letter before I mail it."

"It isn't that," said Rob, looking utterly wretched. "I'm not even in love; at least I don't think I am."

"What then, you foolish boy?"

"Oh, sir—Mr. Harrington—you have been such a friend to me, and I have done such a dishonorable thing!"

"You dishonorable? I hope not, Rob. I should be sorry to be disappointed in you when I have loved you like a brother."

"You will despise me when you know all, and yet, Mr. Harrington, it was you who gave me leave to begin it. Only I should have stopped there."

"Tell me the whole truth," said Harrington, coldly.

It was hard in the face of such severity to tell the truth, but Rob made a clean breast of it and did not spare himself. He told his friend how he had written first a

friendly business letter according to his instructions; how the answer had piqued his curiosity and he had written again, and finally Hope Glenn had asked him for a picture, and he——

“Whose picture did you send?” asked Harrington, in a voice that sent all the color from Rob’s face.

There was no answer. The young man fixed his sorry eyes on his desk and listened to the beating of his heart.

“So you not only write letters to this unknown lady, masquerading over my name, but you send her my photograph as proof positive that I am the fool she takes me to be. I would rather you dishonored me commercially, Rob, than used my name for such a purpose. Dishonesty in friendship is akin to perjury. You may have done the cruelest wrong with your fictitious love-making.”

“They were not love-letters, Mr. Harrington,” asserted Rob. “At least not what I would call love-letters. They were not very personal. I tried to be dignified

and grave, like you, sir, in what I said. I—I don't think you would be ashamed of them sir."

"Rob," asked the other, after a long silence, "are you in love with this unknown writer?"

"No, sir," answered Rob, decidedly; "I am not. And I never should be in love with any woman who wrote for the newspapers or knew enough to. When I fall in love with any one, Mr. Harrington, it will be with a girl who is ignorant."

"There you would make the greatest mistake of your life, Rob. An ignorant woman is narrow, stupid and bigoted. If she were as beautiful as an angel you would weary of her and her insipid company."

"But I would teach her, sir. If she loved me she would be willing to learn to please me."

"Rob, do you remember how David Copperfield taught Dora, his little child-wife, and what the result was?"

"I hope you don't think I am such a prig as that Copperfield boy? I should have thought Dora perfect just as she was."

"No doubt. But about those letters: I do not know what to do. They are postmarked from the same town where a very dear friend of mine lives. I might learn through her if any harm has been done. But Hope Glenn is a fictitious name; it may not be known there. I hardly know what to do."

But that night Edgar Harrington received a letter which offered a solution to one problem while it presented another. Hurrying to Rob's quarters he burst in upon him with precipitate haste.

"Be ready to leave with me in an hour. Take those letters with you."

"What is it?" asked Rob, with white lips.

"It is that your miserable fooling has resulted in great sorrow and trouble to the dearest friend I have on earth. Get ready. I will tell you all I know on the way."

When the Susquehanna Valley train drew out that night Harrington and Rob were both on board.

CHAPTER XI.

NOBODY KNOWS.

Mammy had been very slow to recognize the right of her new mistress to expect or exact habits of respectful obedience to her. It was not the native stubbornness of her own race that prevented her, but she was encouraged in her spirit of aggressiveness by the conduct of the two girls—her “young ladies,” as she always called them. Mammy herself had been raised to the strictest habits of discipline. It had never been permitted to her in the old rule under “Miss Marie” to have a voice in any matter. “Hers not to make reply,” was an invincible law. But since those days Mammy had been almost her own mistress. It was the law of love that compelled her to obey the children in every foolish request. Their way was her

way at all times. She believed it a religious duty to assist the two girls in their domestic rebellions. In anything she undertook she was as obstinate as those who combine ignorance and prejudice in their natures always are. Beatrice had made a great allowance for her, because hers had been almost entirely a service of love. She had clung to the family through good report and evil report, had scorned to take advantage of the freedom thrust upon her, and had been a faithful though most injudicious friend of the motherless girls.

The morning after the escapade related in a preceding chapter Mrs. Marsden went down to the kitchen with a heavy heart. She, who had all her life held principle so dear, found herself now allied with those who seemed entirely void of that integral jewel, the ballast of all moral adventure. She was not only thoroughly shocked at Marcia's deceit in regard to her assumed illness and inability to move, but she was sorely disappointed in the fact that the whole household aided and abetted her in it.

Cherry—the Major—Mammy—how did she know but what her own father was cognizant of her extraordinary masquerade? How could she deal with people who seemed so morally obtuse?

Mammy was snapping a brittle sheet of dough for Maryland biscuit, and the generous white apron she wore was one of Beatrice's own making, worn only on compulsion. But it made her large proportions very homelike and attractive, and as she worked she sung in a rich, untutored voice the hymns of her people. Beatrice was charmed with the new and picturesque side of the situation. It was so different from the sloppy, intelligence-office girl of the north, who never waited to resent anything, but folded her tent and stole away. The biscuit dough in Mammy's clean hands snapped, and as she sung she wagged her turbaned head from side to side in a weird, antiphonal chant, that was solemn and sad. Beatrice hesitated to enter the kitchen, as an intruder might have done. It seemed to her there was no place either in home or hearts for her. And

yet Mammy's voice went on softly and graciously :

“Ober Jordan, ober Jordan, dere is our home,
O my king.
Ober Jordan, ober Jordan, we's bound to roam,
O my king.
Dere de sweet persimmons grow,
Dere de silver waters flow,
Dere I'se gwine to meet you sho',
O my king.
'Pears like dey dat's gone befo',
O my king,
Neber comes to us no mo',
O my king.
But we's gwine to join 'em where
Jesus sits in judgment fair,
An' I'll shout in glory there,
O my king.”

“Mammy,” said Beatrice, entering as the last note died away, “where were you last night?”

Mammy had started, and for a moment stared at her mistress with protruding eyes. Having satisfied herself that it was not a “ghostess” addressing her she relapsed into her own imperturbable mood.

"I done gone to bed soon as eber der dishes wuz washed," she said, sulkily.

"Yes, I know," temporized her mistress; "but after that—in the night—when you went out, where did you go?"

"I jes' done sleep till sun-up dis yeah mornin'," persisted Mammy.

"You did nothing of the kind, and I will not permit you to tell me such outrageous stories," said Beatrice severely. "I followed you, and saw you and Miss Marcia, who is not able to stand upon her feet unsupported, and Miss Cherry and Major Krum were there, too. I am sorry, Mammy, that you should deceive me in this way, or encourage your young ladies in wrong-doing."

"Dere warn't no harm in gwine to a barbeskew ef dey did go," answered Mammy in a sulky tone; "'taint mos' likely de' folks down yere's gwine to enjoy demselves same as folkes in de Norf, sittin' 'round wid dere fingers in der mouves. An' Miss Marsh, I reckon, she do as she please, ennyhow. Dere kant nobody make her do nothin' she don't wan' ter, nohow."

“Can it be possible, Mammy, that you think it a proper thing for a young lady to be out after midnight in such a company, and when her health is so poor that she cannot sit up an hour in the day? Would her mother, if she were alive, countenance such impropriety for a moment?”

Mammy did not answer at once. She did not want to seem ignorant of the proprieties, but at the same time she recalled certain escapades of her late mistress, Miss Marie, to which Miss Marcia's nocturnal peregrinations seemed very mild amusement. As her mistress pressed her for an answer she said at last in a low, mysterious voice:

“It am a shame to fault-fine' Miss Marsh when eberybody knows she be done conjuh'd.”

“Conjured!” answered Mrs. Marsden, “I thought it was only the colored people who were conjured.”

“Miss Marcia done conjuh'd,” reiterated Mammy, and not another word would she say.

The day following her night adventure

Marcia was disposed to spend in sleep, so that it was nearly night when she consented to see Beatrice in her room.

She lay pallid and motionless on the bed with that unpleasant, repellant look on her face which was habitual to her in disagreeable moods. Her moral and physical temperature were evidently at low mark. She looked defiantly at Beatrice, as if preparing to resist her authority.

"Are you not feeling as well as usual to-day?" asked her stepmother, seating herself without invitation. She had come thither in the stern fulfillment of duty and was predetermined to accept no slight, or be impeded in the work she hoped to accomplish.

"I never feel well," was the sullen answer.

"Do you not think you were unwise in going out last night?" pursued Beatrice calmly.

She was prepared for an impatient denial or prevarication and expected to have a scene of tears and recrimination, but to her

surprise the sick girl merely looked at her with a vague expression of surprise and answered coldly.

"I was not out last night, Mrs. Marsden, and I cannot understand your insinuations."

"Not out last night—not out, when I saw you myself in company with Cherry and Major Krum? Marcia, I cannot believe that you can willfully resort to tricks of falsehood and deception, but what then am I to think when I followed you and saw you with my own eyes walking about as strong apparently as I am."

"It is false," cried the sick girl, excitedly. "You come here when I am alone and helpless and insult me. You know that I am unable to bear my own weight alone and cannot go out either in the daytime or at night. You dare not tell my father such a false, wicked story, and he would not believe you if you did. You have come here where you were not wanted, and made us all wretched. You have taken my father's love away from me and driven off

my true friend, Major Krum. I hate the sight of your cruel, deceitful face. And you would come between Cherry and me, and even make Mammy turn against us if you could. I wish my father had never seen you! I wish my own dear mother had never died!"

Beatrice turned faint and sick, but she would not turn upon the helpless girl. Again she pleaded with her.

"Marcia, why will you do me such a wrong? If you cannot, will not, love me, at least respect me as your father's wife and your own true friend. I will pray for you my child as long as I have breath."

"The stepmother's breath," sneered Marcia with cruel sarcasm.

Beatrice gave the sick girl, whose face was livid with pain or anger, a look full of the divinest pity and love, then without a word she left the room.

A few moments later Cherry entered, bringing her sister some delicacy Mammy had just sent up. Marcia refused to touch it and at once proceeded to relate with

much excitement the scene that had just transpired.

"And to think," she concluded indignantly, "that she did not believe me when I told her that it was impossible that she could have seen me, that I am not able to walk even, and to be accused in such a shameful manner of being out last night. Could it be possible, Cherry, that she mistook someone else for me? Oh, Cherry, who was with the Major?"

"Nobody," said Cherry, not looking her sister in the face.

"Did he ask about me?"

"Yep, talked a heap about you."

"Poor fellow! I mean to send him word that he can come here to see me whenever he pleases. This house isn't hers."

"Yes it is," said Cherry. "Stepmother bought it. Paid a heap of money, Maje says, greengages and things and has writin' to show fur it."

"Mort-gages," corrected Marcia.

"Well, some kind of plums. Say, Marsh, am I as ignorant as a hoss?"

"Horse, you mean, Cherry. I am afraid you are, but who said so?"

"Oh, I heerd of it. I've a great big mind to let her learn me something."

"Teach you, you mean. That woman, Cherry, when she has treated me so badly, so shamefully? Why, Cherry, you don't seem to care that she said I was out at a dance last night; I dreamed of one and thought I saw you and the Major there, and there was a woman with him—a pale girl wearing a cloak. I wonder what it means."

"I reckon she saw the woman and thought it was you, Marsh."

"But you said," and here Marcia became excited and raised herself. "You said there was no one—no one with the Major."

"He might have spoken to some one for all I know. I was dancin'. I danced down Hi Corbin and it most killed him. It took us two hours an' a half. Then he faynted. I reckon he ain't a goin' to brag up his dancin' any more,"

CHAPTER XII.

“ROCK ME TO SLEEP, MOTHER.”

The Judge had insisted upon the presence of Cherry at each meal, but unless he went after her and brought her in by main force—the girl kicking and scratching at every step—it was very seldom she appeared. So far as he was concerned he would much rather have eaten without her, but it was the wish of Beatrice that he assert his parental authority in the matter. When she did come she walked in and took her seat with a saucy air of defiance that was put on purposely for the occasion and was as aggravating as it was rude and disagreeable to the unhappy stepmother subjected to it. But she was so beautiful and charming even in her willfulness that Beatrice would not despair, but fortified herself with the hope that at some time she would find the way to the child's heart.

For she saw that Cherry really possessed a heart, smothered as it was in the rank weeds of ignorance and frivolity. Her first intimation that the girl could be reached and subdued in any way came to her like a revelation. Mrs. Madeira and her daughter Grace, a beautiful young lady of Marcia's age, called to invite Mrs. Marsden, the Judge and Cherry to an evening company. Grace Madeira went up to Marcia's room while her mother chatted with Beatrice who was always glad to meet her. Beatrice wore a pretty house costume, one of her wedding outfit, and the large parlor was in keeping with the dress of its mistress—stately and in good taste. While the two ladies were chatting on various topics Cherry sprung in through the window in her usual impulsive style. She had been in the woods gathering leaves and mosses, and her disheveled hair, disordered dress and youthful beauty gave her the appearance of a childish Ophelia. She was nothing daunted by the presence of Mrs. Madeira, nor would she have been if it had

been the minister himself. Mrs. Madeira had just asked Mrs. Marsden to play something on the little old-fashioned but elegant piano which stood severely locked in its rich carvings between the windows.

"I should be glad to do so," answered Beatrice, "but I have never had the key of the instrument. It is months since I played."

"Oh, Cherry," said Mrs. Madeira, presuming on her long acquaintance with the family, "is there no way to open it?"

"I reckon thare is," said Cherry, shortly. "It's Marsh's piano, and she keeps the key on a string 'round her neck. Step-mother mought ask her fur it ef she wants it."

Beatrice changed the conversation, while Mrs. Madeira, distressed beyond measure, looked her displeasure at the thoughtless girl; nor did she for a moment anticipate that Cherry would accept the invitation already given to attend the party.

Beatrice, however, anticipated the matter by preparing her a very pretty costume,

made out of one that had belonged to the Judge's first wife, which, with some other things, had been kept under lock and key and had not been ruthlessly sacrificed to a lesser service. The girl had often seen her mother wear it and did not fail to recognize it when, with new ribbons, it was laid upon a chair in her room. How she accepted it, or whether she accepted it at all, Beatrice did not know, nor could she learn whether the girl intended to wear it or even to be present. The Judge had been too busy to interfere, and she had answered her stepmother with her usual impertinent nonchalance, so when the time came Beatrice went alone, leaving Cherry to follow or stay at home as she herself should elect.

The company, composed of the best people in the village, had all assembled, and were sitting in stiff, absorbed silence, after the fashion of sociables, studying the northern splendor and freshness of Mrs. Judge Marsden's dress—a plain, dark silk, worn with some handsome lace, when all were

astonished by a piping voice at the minister's elbow, saying, with ludicrous solemnity:

"And Satan came also—have a cheer?—don't mind ef I do."

It was Cherry, but not the Cherry of other days. She wore her pretty, new dress, and looked so graceful, roguish and pretty in it that all eyes were charmed, and Beatrice felt well repaid for her labor. What would have paid her infinitely better, however, was lacking—any kindly recognition of herself. The girl flounced into a corner, where she was soon surrounded by the younger members of the family, for whom she had special attractions, her quaint ways, her mimicry, and her abnormal flow of spirits making her very entertaining company to the youngsters.

In the course of the evening the Judge's wife was invited by her hostess to furnish some music. There was a very indifferent piano, and Beatrice regretted the fatuity that led her to part with her own superb instrument upon the representation of Richard that there was a fine piano in her

new home. She was a thorough musician, and had often relieved her pent-up sorrows—sorrows of the past which she had to bear alone—with the soothing strains of Mendelssohn or the inspiration of Schumann. She sat down now to the instrument and gave one rapid, comprehensive glance at her audience. She felt sure the keys would respond to her touch with the “Sweet By-and-by” or “Nearer, My God, to Thee,” and almost wondered at the ease with which they followed her in the “Moonlight Sonata” of Beethoven. As the last note died away she saw the people yawning and fidgeting, and for a moment her fingers lay idly on the keys. Then she touched a chord softly, and with a clear, sweet voice, charged with an electric, sympathetic quality, sung a ballad that was popular then as now, and had the power to touch every heart. Beatrice sung it with a homesick longing for the reality, and more than one head bowed itself in tears, and more than one heart responded with a sigh of mingled love and longing



In a moment the impulsive Cherry was in the old woman's lap.

as the tender, impassioned prayer, the outcome of a broken heart, was slowly breathed to the sad music.

“Backward, turn backward, O time in your flight,
 Make me a child again, just for to-night.
 Mother, come back from the echoless shore,
 Take me again to your heart as of yore;
 Kiss from my forehead the furrows of care,
 Smooth the few silver threads out of my hair;
 Over my slumbers your loving watch keep,
 Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.

When the first verse was finished the singer paused; she felt her voice filling with tears, and every note was a sob. She did not wish to make others suffer.

“Oh, do go on; please sing it through,” exclaimed Mrs. Madeira, a request in which all the company joined.

Beatrice was about to substitute some joyous strain when she saw that Cherry had moved forward and taken a position near the instrument. Her face was pale and sober, and a new and inexplicable expression shone in her bright restless eyes. It seemed to plead for a continuation of

the song, and this decided Beatrice, and she sang the second verse.

“Backward, flow backward, O tide of the years,
I am so weary of toil and of tears,
Toil without recompense, tears all in vain;
Take them and give me my childhood again.
I have grown weary of dust and decay,
Weary of flinging my soul wealth away,
Weary of sowing for others to reap,
Rock me to sleep, mother, rock me to sleep.”

A moment's silence followed the exquisitely sad lines, and the vibration of voice and instrument still held the air, when Cherry dashed from the room and was seen no more that evening. Beatrice substituted a merry, mad Strauss waltz and the sadness was dispelled. The Judge's wife was secretly encored and applauded in the hearts of the social critics, and as they took their leave the pair were overwhelmed with “invites” to attend socials and tea parties among the Spartans.

“You have had quite a triumph this evening, Beatrice,” said the Judge, as they walked homeward.

"I hope so," answered his wife, ambiguously.

She was thinking of Cherry.

"Is my wife hungering for applause?" inquired Richard, grandiloquently.

"Oh, it isn't that," retorted Beatrice. "What do I care for those people? Not but what I am happy to have pleased or amused them; but oh, Richard, did you see Cherry? She wore the dress I made her—she listened to my singing—it is only a step onward, but I thank God for it."

"Beatrice," said the Judge, indifferently, "I do think you are a monomaniac on the subject of those children. You overdo this stepmother business."

"Richard, I wish you would discontinue the use of that odious word. Since fate—no, since God—has willed it that I should be a representative of that despised and unhappy class I will devote my life to elevating and improving my position, but it is a hard work to do. If I am just, I seem hard. I cannot win respect, much less love. To-night I have had the first

glimpse of comfort that has been vouchsafed me. Oh, Richard, you are answerable to God for the future of these dear children. Help me to win their love."

"Y-a-a-s," answered the Judge, sleepily. "The children are well enough, Beatrice; don't worry."

"Toil without recompense, tears all in vain," thought the discouraged woman, sadly.

Before she slept Beatrice stole softly into Cherry's room, beset by a vague fear that she might be engaged in some midnight escapade. But the child was sound asleep. One rosy arm was thrown above her head—her pretty dimpled face was smiling and peaceful. The stepmother watched her a long time. She thought of that little head that had so long been pillowed under the grave-gemmed mold of Mount Hope—of the mute lips that had never called her mother. She thought of that other woman whose child lay sleeping before her—of the cruel wrong she had wrought her. Was it her spirit that held these children aloof from

her? Tears gathered in her eyes at her own desolation. Last, where she should have been first. Then rose to her lips that divine prayer, "Father, forgive them—they know not what they do."

Stooping over the sleeping child she pressed a kiss of love and forgiveness upon the white brow, from which the sunny curls were brushed away. Cherry half-awakened. "Stepmother!" she murmured, and turned her head on its pillow.

"Even in her sleep she hates me," thought Beatrice, sadly.

As she turned to leave the room she saw the pretty dress Cherry had worn, folded carefully and laid on a chair. It gave her a new hope, since it was the first time that she had ever shown that she valued any gift from her stepmother's hand.

"With Love for her master she may yet become a daughter of the gods," thought Beatrice, as she left her alone.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GREEN-EYED.

The Judge sat alone in the "den" which was his own special retreat and smoked an old clay pipe—the beloved companion of his solitary hours—at which he pulled now with vindictive energy, as if it were somehow bent on resisting his will. Something evidently had happened to disturb the calm suavity of his listless nature, for a volcano of angry emotions was surging in his heart. Before him lay a letter addressed to his wife, which he had just read and thrown down, using as he did so one of those superfluous oaths which usually lie in wait on the heels of erascible speech. He had sent for Major Krum, who for so many years had been his faithful henchman, and who since the coming of Beatrice had been dismissed from his privileged place

in the family, and was now awaiting him in a tumult of angry thought and of really cruel disappointment. He had believed fully that Beatrice loved him with the whole depth of her woman's affection until he read that letter.

When the Major came he walked to the table at which the Judge was sitting, took a black bottle and a glass away and hid them in a closet, which he seemed to have no difficulty in finding, and locking them up, dropped the key in his pocket.

"D—d cool, I must say," snarled the Judge, "to treat a man that way in his own house."

"I don't treat; that is what you will thank me for when you are yourself again. Now what is wrong this time? You seem to be pretty well hetchelled up about somethin'."

"Read that letter," drawled the Judge in dangerously soft tones.

"A letter addressed to Mrs. Marsden? When I get that lady's permission to read it I will—not before."

"Then hear me read it," suggested the Judge, in the same repressed voice:

"'My beloved—'"

"Stop!" commanded Major Krum, with military vehemence. "By G—d, Judge, I ain't much of a saint, as you know, but when a man stoops to discuss his wife—and such a wife—with any other man living I don't want to know him. No, sir! And if you persist in this, sir, I must decline the honah of your acquaintance; yes, sir! the honah of your acquaintance."

For a moment the Judge stared hard. Then he laughed a soulless, metallic laugh that struck on the Major's soul like flint, and like flint elicited fire.

"Look at me," he exclaimed, with tragic eloquence. "Look at this manly form, clad in respectable clothes. Look at the face that was livid with dissipation—at the hands that trembled like a leaf in the breeze. There's health, there's vigor, there's manhood, sir, and I owe it to her—your wife—to her womanly example, her patient pleading, her goodness. And

now you want me to repay her with insult. Burn that letter. If it has aught to say against her it's the device of an enemy. Burn it, and trust her as you would an angel from heaven."

"Angels from heaven don't get love-letters written by other men than their husbands," sneered the Judge.

"Look heah, Marsden, stand up, won't you?" retorted the Major.

"Why should I stand up?"

"So that I can knock you down like a man. You'll thank me for it when you come to yourself."

The Judge fingered the letter irresolutely, and the Major followed up his advantage.

"Can't you see for yourself, Judge, that your wife's letters don't belong to you. Why man, there isn't a postoffice in the state that would give you one of them if she told them not to. Ef you can't trust her you've no chance in that direction. Now she didn't marry you on compulsion. I've heard you were old lovers, and she ain't the kind of woman to love one man and marry another,

sure as you're bawn, Jedge. Jest you hand that letter to her, and tell her—say, how did you get it?"

"Found it here on my desk."

"Oh! ah! umph! Who put it there?"

"Cherry, I think. A nice thing for a man's children to do, hey? but perfectly right under the circumstances."

"Puffickly wrong," answered the Major. "Jedge, let me take that letter and give it back to Cherry. The children—the girls—ahem—" The Major stammered and grew red. "Miss Marcia, of course, would not do it, but I think Cherry is coming round. She'll put that letter back where she found it."

"Take it," said the Judge, regarding it as if it were a rattlesnake.

Cherry was seated upon the horse-block feeding the birds when the Major found her, she was not well pleased with her morning's work. Something in her stubborn little heart gave her trouble—a pin-prick of conscience, possibly. She whistled very loud when she saw the Major, and affected not to see the letter in his hand.

"There, you've frightened all the birds away, scarecrow," she said, with her usual brusque impertinence.

"Cherry," asked the Major, solemnly, "why are you so good to birds and beasts, and so hateful to people?"

"I don't like people."

"Don't you love anybody in the world, Cherry?"

"Yes"—and the bright eyes grew tender—"Marsh, and Mammy, and you—when you 'have yohse'f."

"Your father?"

"Naw; why, he isn't anything to me. But I like him bettah than stepmother."

"Cherry!—keep still now—don't you run away; I want you to take this letter and put it where you found it."

"What lettah?" asked the girl, wickedly. "Stepmother's?"

"Yes."

Cherry seemed to be considering. She tore a large rent in the skirt of her dress in her perplexity, and kicked one ragged, down-at-the-heel slipper to a distance, where

she immediately hopped on one foot to recover it. She whistled a bird-song that brought responses from the neighboring trees. Then she looked at the Major, with her pretty head on one side.

"I believe she is a witch," said the Major to himself.

"Maje," she asked, suddenly, "kin you keep a secret?"

"Cross my heart," answered the Major, tragically.

"Then, if you'll promise to nevah, nevah tole, I'll tole you somethin'. Marsh and stepmother's both got the same beau."

"What?" roared the Major; "Marsh——"

"H-u-s-h up! They'll hear yoh in the house. It's Gospil truth, an'—an' yoh won't nevah tole? I'm half in love with him my own se'f."

It was the Major's turn to rave. Marcia—Marcia, his idol, whom he had loved since she was an infant in long clothes—Marcia, whose mother had been the star he worshiped in his youthful days, and to whom he had transferred his allegiance at

first sight and nourished it ever since—even though a forlorn hope. Marcia in love with another man! The Major felt the world rolling away from under him. He knew without being told that he was nearly as old as her father—that he could bring her only the husks of a dissipated life to satisfy her soul. But he had not once felt himself insufficient. How many times had he lifted her in his arms to carry her when she could not walk, even as a mother would carry a young child. It was not until Beatrice came there that he saw himself a wasted convivialist, seeking only the gratification of a debasing appetite. She had shown him up in his true colors, had taught him to live a nobler life, had helped him to a financial standing, and put him on a probation, at the end of which time he expected to be able to make a home for his dear invalid. The Major was so upset that he leaned his head on Cherry's shoulder and groaned:

“Oh, Cherry! Cherry! I'm a broken-hearted man!”

"Take your head off my shouldear," commanded the child, with dignity; "an' don't sniffle while I tole you 'bout it. Marsh writes pieces and they're printed in the paper—you know, 'cause she's tole you—an' you don't much like it—but this yeah Yank, he's been writin' to her an' sort of makin' love. Say, Maje, how do folks make love?"

She dropped her pretty chin into her hand, and looked with her bright, childish eyes—innocent as those of any song-bird—into the flushed countenance of the Major, who was consuming with wretchedness and jealousy.

"I dunno," he answered, gloomily; "there ain't any such thing as love in the world. Nobody loves anybody, so far as I can see."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Cherry; "you doan' love Marsh—Marsh doan' love—what's his name—Edgar—Mr. Harrington, hum—mebbe not."

At this moment Beatrice came toward them. Her sweet face—always serene and

dignified, even though it bore an habitual look of trouble—seemed sad and downcast. Cherry snatched the letter from the Major and held it up.

“Lookin’ for this?” she queried, pertly. Beatrice stared a moment in genuine surprise.

“Where did you obtain this letter?” she asked, calmly.

“’Tained it from the floor,” was the answer.

“Have you been reading my correspondence?” inquired Beatrice, looking in turn from one to the other.

“Answer your mother, Cherry,” said the Major, in a sulky voice.

“I picked the lettah up and gave it to Marsh,” answered the girl, defiantly.

“What right had you to give my letters to any one?”

“Don’t be scared, she didn’t read it. I took it down to feyther this s’morn to give back to you. Dunno how Maje got it. All the same,” continued the girl, stamping her foot and pointing to the let-

ter, "he's Marsh's beau and has writ her a heap of lettahs."

"How dare he write to her? She must be a stranger to him. Or is he some chance acquaintance of her school days? Mrs. Marsden, is he a friend of yours?"

"A very dear friend," answered Beatrice, with white lips. "Perhaps the only friend I have in the world at this moment—Major Krum, did you read my letter?"

"Can you ask me such a question?" answered the Major, warmly. "Deceit (he pronounced it decate) and treachery may undermine me. Before God I may be a sinner, but I'm not a traytor."

"I will see Marcia," said Beatrice, and carrying the letter in her hand she reëntered the house, leaving Cherry and the Major in angry consultation.

When she entered the sick girl's room she found her sleeping, and sitting down beside her she contemplated her long and sadly. Bereaved of children of her own her woman's heart went out to this motherless girl who rejected all her advances. There was

something deathlike in the motionless figure, which lay relaxed and inert in a sleep that was the counterfeit of death. An unwholesome pallor lay upon the sunken features, and a look of passive weariness. Beatrice no longer wondered at this, now that she was aware of the girl's nocturnal rambles. What she did wonder at was that, with so much license to do as she pleased, she should have any motive for going out in this silent, secret way or in pretending to be utterly helpless when she was not. She knew that the night was also given to writing, since no evidence of such work appeared. Nor could she determine Marcia's object in such resolute secrecy concerning a most honorable employment. No doubt the girl's object at first had been to acquire some money. Her stepmother's generosity had surrounded her with all comforts and made that motive unnecessary. Beatrice sighed deeply over the duplicity of one so young, and the sick girl at once opened her eyes wide and looked at her with mistrust and dislike.

"Marcia," said Beatrice, gently, "I have a letter here directed to me and written to me which Cherry says you have seen. Will you please answer me one question? Is the same person who wrote this letter to me also maintaining a correspondence with you?"

The girl's sallow cheeks flushed a vindictive red.

"Yes," she answered, coldly. "He is."

"That is enough. I have nothing more to say," and she left the room, believing that Marcia had obtained the name of Edgar Harrington from her own private letters in an attempt to undermine and injure Beatrice with one who loved her, and if possible disrupt the ties which bound her father to a hated stepmother.

And Marcia, excited to fever-heat, threw off partially the lassitude which enthralled her, and spread open letter after letter, all written in the same irregular, boyish handwriting, significant of college copy hand, but atoning for the immaturity of their penmanship by the warmth of their language.

"I wish I had her letter here to compare them again. It seems as if hers were older and wiser, more manly, and yet the name, the signature, is the same, Edgar Harrington. Why does he write to one of us in a hand disguised? Why does he write loving words to both? Stepmother and rival, I hate you."

She clenched her frail hands in a spasm of unchristian rage, and closed her weary, lusterless eyes in a fit of thinking.

It was broken at last by the entrance of Cherry, looking most unamiable.

"Marsh, I'm awful discouraged. What sort of folks are we, anyhow? There's feyther mad as hops 'cause stepmother had that letter. An' Maje rairin' roun' 'cause a feller has writ tew you. An' there don't ennybody care for me a single bit now. I went into the kitchin' an' Mammy says, 'Tote off, I ain't gwine to hev no carryin's on heah. Somethin's clar out of joint roun' these parts.' An' stepmother's in her room cryin'. I wouldn't want tew be in her shoes."

"Perhaps you had better go and comfort her," suggested her sister, with unpleasant sarcasm.

"Marsh, is that a love-lettah, the one that stepmother got?"

"I suppose so," answered Marcia, "and yet I am not sure. It reads like one, but in books men write such letters to women they admire and respect very much. Platonic love is what they call the sentiment. I cannot explain it to you, Cherry, so that you can understand."

"You needn't try," returned Cherry. "I like the other kind best. Ennybody that ever falls in love with this child isn't goin' round making love to other gyrls, not much."

"It is only very noble, superior women who inspire such a love," said Marcia.

"Is stepmother a noble woman?" asked Cherry presently.

"Go away, Cherry; I wish to sleep," was the petulant answer.

Cherry went. She intended going off on one of her usual jaunts where she could

work off her superfluous vitality in nature's gymnasium, but as she passed the door of her stepmother's room she heard her singing in a low minor key, and stopped to listen. It was a recitative of her own composition, set to music as sad as the words.

"No place for me in all the broad, green earth,
No heart that beats responsive to my own.
I may not share the sorrows or the mirth
Of those who leave me to myself alone.

"Mother, and yet no living child is mine—
That sweet and precious name to me denied.
Oh, breaking heart, have faith, in worlds divine
My child will welcome me at eventide.

"Oh, not for me the rose without its thorn,
Not mine the path of pleasure, broad and free.
I may not with the crown my brows adorn,
The heavy cross must first my portion be.

"No place for me ! An alien ! in this home
I may not linger an unwelcome guest.
I hear a voice that softly whispers, 'Come,'
And bids me enter on my promised rest."

It was an improvised song, such as Beatrice was often accustomed to sing almost unconsciously, and to which her

trembling voice and sad music gave an indescribable pathos. Her eyes had been closed and her head thrown back on a reclining chair. Hearing a sound something like a sob she arose quickly and saw Cherry standing before her. But the sob was only the respiration of a contracted throat. No tear glistened upon the round, red cheek or dimmed the feverish brightness of the child's eyes. Beatrice saw, however, that her soul was stirred to its depths, and she held out loving arms with the cry, "My child!" But, elusive as a will-of-the-wisp, the girl turned abruptly and was gone. But there had been that in her face that was a most welcome revelation to the unloved mother. With a heart full of sorrowful yearning Beatrice, as was her wont, prayed long and earnestly that her work might soon be accomplished. It was dark when, with an exhaustive weakness, she rose from her petition and realized that from an excess of feeling she had fainted on her knees.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SILENT TREATMENT.

That night Beatrice had a strange dream. Her husband had not spoken to her since he had read the letter which Cherry—unhappy child—had thoughtlessly rather than maliciously placed in his way. He went about in a dazed sort of a way, apparently overcome by his old enemy—drink. He slept, but it was that sodden, brutal sleep in which a man of intellect and brains seems so immeasurably inferior to a brute animal. A night-taper burned on the dressing-bureau and filled the room with fitful shadows. The hounds, turned loose for the night, barked and snarled among themselves, or gave voice as they raced after some flying fox that had ventured too near. But these were sounds of such nightly occurrence that they seldom awakened the sleepers.

Beatrice dreamed that she was walking in a deep, dark tunnel, when she came to a light that appeared to be an open door. Then a form appeared in the doorway; the radiant figure beckoned to her, and as she approached she saw that it was the school-friend of her youth, the lovely and gentle Alma. She was dressed in some white, glistening stuff, of a texture such as Beatrice had never seen. On the shining floor, at her feet, lay a crown of white flowers. Her face was the same as of old, but lighted from within with a celestial brightness. Beatrice even noticed upon her hand a ring such as she had often seen her wear. And this was the conversation that she dreamed they held:

ALMA. "Not yet, dear sister. We may not embrace until you have passed through the open door and have on these garments we wear. It is not yet time for that."

BEATRICE. "But I am weary and sore discouraged. No one on earth needs me. I cannot do the work I took up so bravely. I have tried and failed."

ALMA. "Only the Master can decide that. He will send his messenger in good time. Be patient and strong, dear sister, for the troubles of earth are but for a little season, for which, too, there is a blessed compensation."

BEATRICE. "Are you, then, so happy, dearest Alma? Is it indeed true what is told of that wonderful country?"

ALMA. "Nothing has been told or imagined that approaches the truth. The greatest joys of earth are cold and poor when compared to the blissful rest we enjoy here, the peace that is never broken, the happiness that never fades."

BEATRICE. "You are so lovely, dearest Alma, so wonderfully fair; your flesh is like alabaster or pearl in its whiteness."

ALMA. "They are all like this where I come from, sister. Return now to your appointed work. I will soon welcome you here. I hear the Master calling."

Then Beatrice dreamed that the open door was closed, and she was shut out in thick darkness. A sense of suffoca-

tion oppressed her, she struggled and awoke.

There is a sixth sense which science has never named. It is that by which we become conscious of the presence of an unseen person. Beatrice was not alone. Her husband was sleeping soundly by her side; yet before she had opened her eyes she was aware that some one was looking at her. She sat up and confronted Marcia—Marcia in a white night-robe—who was standing, looking directly at her, but who turned without embarrassment and began to fumble among the articles on the toilet table. Beatrice was unmistakably a woman of good judgment, but the tragic thought that at once entered her mind was, "She has come to poison me!" and such a wave of despair swept over her soul that she would have drunk without protest any drug offered her. But Marcia carried neither powder nor potion. In her right hand she held a night-lamp similar to the one burning in the room; with her left she made strange passes over the table, as if seeking some-

thing by the sense of touch. Beatrice slipped quietly from her bed and caught the girl by the arm with such firmness that the grasp turned her around and compelled her to face her. There was a moment's pause followed by a fearful scream. Beatrice instantly relaxed her hold, and the girl fell to the floor insensible, extinguishing the lamp, which lay broken at her feet. The scream brought Cherry and Mammy, and the Judge, awakened by the tumult, rose hurriedly, and wrapping himself in his dressing-gown inquired sarcastically if the guerrillas had arrived. But he was really alarmed when he saw his daughter lying insensible at his feet, and with the rest hurried to administer restoratives. It was a scene of confusion and dismay, Cherry crying, Mammy reiterating the mysterious phrase, "done conju'd," and Beatrice rubbing the cold hands and applying restoratives. When they finally succeeded in restoring her to sensibility she was in her own bed, but she looked about her in vague alarm.

"What is it? Where am I? What has happened?"

Beatrice noticed a new quality in her voice, and a change in the expression of her features. As her eyes rested upon her step-mother there was neither distrust nor aversion in them—nothing but an eager curiosity. Cherry, who had been weeping loudly and wringing her hands, now added to the general mystery by remarking to Mammy:

"It didn't kill her, afteh all."

"What do they mean?" asked Beatrice of her husband.

There was some embarrassment in his manner, and he shifted uneasily from one foot to the other, and his eyes did not meet hers as he hurriedly answered his wife's question.

"Oh, it's nothing. I meant to tell you, but thought it was of no consequence. The truth is, ever since she returned from school Marcia has been a sleep-walker—a somnambulist."

"Oh, Richard! and you never told me!

Was I so little deserving of your confidence as this?"

"Well, it wasn't a pleasant thing to talk about—something like having fits in the family, or St. Vitus' dance. One isn't fond of showing up such family skeletons."

"But you have let this poor child suffer when she might now be in vigorous health."

"That sounds as if you were going to advertise some patent medicine, Beatrice," responded the Judge. "I have had the best doctors to see her, but they said it was a disease of the nerves and could do nothing to help her."

"There are no diseases of the nerves," answered Beatrice, warmly, "that cannot be controlled by the mind. You will see that Marcia will cure herself now without medicine if she will submit to the silent control of a stronger will. The spell is broken by violence and accident, but it could more easily have been willed away by a scientific intelligence."

"Everybody said as it would kill her if she was woken up like that when she

walked about," said Cherry, who, humanized and tearful, hung over her sister, the only being on earth whom she fondly loved.

"Is yoh bettah, honey?" inquired Mammy, bending her sympathetic black visage above the white face sunken into the pillow. "Is yoh mortal suah it ain't done killed yoh?"

"If you will all leave the room," said Beatrice presently, "I will stay with Marcia the rest of the night."

"What did she want in our room, Beatrice?" asked the Judge at this moment, as if the thought had just occurred to him.

"I have not the least idea," answered his wife with a shudder, as her first suspicion recurred to her. "Do you know, Cherry?"

"She said last night she wanted to get—a—lettah," muttered Cherry, with her eyes upon her sister, who, however, took no notice of her.

"A letter! my letter? Is it possible that I am an object of suspicion in my own household? That my husband's children are spies in his service."

Beatrice spoke with withering scorn, her

fine head superbly poised, her eyes humid with tears of shame and regret.

"It is your own fault, madam," her husband answered, severely. "When a wife receives letters which she does not wish her husband to read she herself furnishes the evidence which condemns her."

"You never asked me for the letters, Richard, or even gave me a chance to offer an explanation. But now I will say that it is despotism—tyranny of the most degrading sort—for a husband to demand as a right that he shall see the letters which are written to his wife by men or women, either. If he suspects her of infidelity to him or to his interest he has legal redress. But if he loves his wife and has confidence in her integrity he will understand that she will have no friends who will not respect and honor her for her own sake as well as his. My friendships are my own—my friend's written words to me are for me alone. It is you who put upon me the dishonor of a base suspicion."

The Judge retorted with an imprecation, and left the room. Cherry went with him, and Beatrice turned to the sick girl, who was regarding her tenderly, almost lovingly.

"Sleep," she murmured, softly; "sleep, Marcia, and awaken restored to health. You will not be weak or sick or bound in the service of somnambulism. You will be well, in full vigor, with the use of all your faculties when you awake. Sleep! *I will it.* And while you sleep I will watch. Matter is inert. It is subject to the power of mind. The over-soul of the universe is stronger than the powers of disease."

Quietly the sick girl closed her eyes and drifted away—away to the calm seas of rest and infinite peace, to which the spirit, disembodied by sleep, dreamlessly goes. Beatrice sat near her with bent head and closed eyes. Hour after hour glided away and still the sick girl slept, and still Beatrice sat there motionless, rigid, giving out the precious mind healing, which is the special gift of the Christian scientist. Day dawned and the sun rose; noon came and

passed; to all inquiries a backward motion from Beatrice and a finger pressed to the lips made answer. Alas! what harm has been done by over-officiousness. It has been well said that ignorance can tear down in a day what knowledge has been a thousand years building. It was Mammy who, in the stupidity of her faithful nature, broke the spell at last by forcing her way in, with a tray of refreshments, sure that her "deah Miss Marsh was done starved." Marcia opened her eyes and sprang up in bed, feeling new life in every limb and prescient with health and vigor, but the tired and prostrated healer, out of whom so much magnetism had escaped, lay back in her chair, white, insensible, and to all appearance dead.

CHAPTER XV.

CROOKED PATHS MADE STRAIGHT.

"This must be the place," said one of two strangers who stood regarding Clyffe House with curious eyes. "Why, I had expected something of civilization here, but this ancient pile is as dignified a ruin as one could wish to see. Picturesque, rather, isn't it, Rob?"

"Yes, sir," answered the younger man, with a very respectful intonation. "It looks as if it had been some feudal castle of the sixteenth century."

"What do you know of feudal castles, Rob?" interrogated Edgar Harrington, as a smile of amusement crossed for a moment his anxious face. "The place has a natural beauty to commend it. This unfamiliar foliage is beautiful. This must be a tulip-bush. But there is no appearance of life here."

"I should admire to know where the front door is," said Rob, dropping into his native Boston dialect.

"Why, on the side of the pillared portico, of course," answered Harrington. "Look, there's a face at the window. There's a plant indigenous to the south."

Mr. Harrington was looking at Mammy's black face, set off by round, staring eyes and a red turban, and was naturally rather startled at Rob's exclamation:

"Good heavens, what a beauty! what a face—what a superb color!"

The boy was looking at a small young face that was pressed so close to the glass that the nose was flattened, and four white spots outlined by the pressure, but which was, nevertheless, charming as a picture, the pink color, cleft chin and bright, spirited expression indicating a personal beauty as rare as it was inviting.

As Mr. Harrington turned, in surprise, to ask of his companion his meaning of this seeming confusion of ideas, he followed Rob's eyes and caught a glance of the

same face, which vanished from the window as soon as he perceived it.

"That must be the one called Cherry," he said. "The other is an invalid."

Rob's face flushed uncomfortably; he leaned over the palings and looked as if at the last moment he might be tempted to run away. He glanced at the window again, and saw that a reinforcement had arrived.

"Is there a third young lady in the family?" he asked.

For a slight, fair girl, with her hands clasped above her waist, and a profusion of brown hair falling about her shoulders, was looking out at them; her large, dark eyes met those of Edgar Harrington, who felt a strange, electric thrill pass through his veins, a feeling of glad, pleasurable emotion, that moved his heart with a sudden stir. For a moment he forgot where he was or what had brought him thither. Then this second vision faded and was gone.

Rob laughed, though not very merrily,

for he, too, felt a thrill—that of approaching doom.

“We will be taken for housebreakers if we stand round here much longer,” he said. “They have let loose the dogs of war upon us!” he cried, in real alarm, as half-a-dozen long, ungainly hounds burst out with furious barkings and yelpings.

“Call off your dogs,” he yelled, climbing on the fence.

Mr. Harrington stood his ground, and the dogs contented themselves with frantic demonstrations, which did not invite further acquaintance. Then Mammy opened the door and called with a voice of authority:

“Yeah, Plantyjinnet, Brandywine, Beaury-go’d and Jackson! come in yeah an’ shet off dat noise! yeah, Rocket and Trip—yeah, Brandy, Brandy, Brandy.”

Brandy, who seemed to be the leader, and was a long, lean hound with humped shoulders and red jaws, turned sulkily and growling fiercely led the pack under the house again into their hiding places.

“Ef you’s e lookin’ foh de Jedge yoh can

go roun' to de front and ring de bell, but ef you'se jest loafers and tramps yoh can jest get out of dis yeah right quick, or I'll set de houn's on and dey'll chaw yoh up in no time."

Mammy's old-time hospitality had suffered a sea-change since "de wah." The two travelers did not stop upon the order of their going but went at once, and in a moment after they had rung the bell her serene face appeared at the front door. She showed the gentlemen in and took Edgar Harrington's card with the manner of an empress.

"Missus Marsden done sick," she said; "I s'pect she doan' feel like seein' no strange folks."

Beatrice appeared to be sleeping; two bright-red spots burned on either cheek and the unnatural emotion through which she had recently passed had given her features a wasted look that resembled the effect of a long illness. The Judge was sitting by her bed, but they were not talking. She was too exhausted and he too sore and angry.

Marcia was walking about from one room to the other, touching everything she saw, seeming to recall her own identity. She was puzzled, wondering, but gracious and gentle. Cherry was looking at herself in the glass, as something had stirred her soul to a womanly weakness. She had smoothed her hair and to her collarless dress had added a sailor collar and tie.

"Marsh?" she asked hastily; "dew I talk so dreadful bad? Folks yeah about don't seem tew think so, but you are allus tellin' me I dew."

"I?" returned Marcia, in surprise—"I—I?—it seems as if you ought to be just a little thing yet. I don't know enough myself to correct you."

"An' you a writin' pieces for the papers, Marsh? I ain't a authoress, like you, but I might speak properer, I suppose. Guess I will go to school yet."

"I—write for the papers! Cherry, you are dreaming, or else I am. I never wrote anything in my life."

"Then *you* must have been a dreamin'.

Oh, Marsh, did you dream about that young man what writ to you? Say!" cried the child, excitedly, "I know now who *he* looks like—it's like that picture he sent—it's him, I know it is!"

"Picture! what picture?" inquired Marcia, with a look of bewilderment.

"They've comed in," exclaimed Cherry. And the next moment Mammy ascended to the room of her mistress with the card.

"Tell him to come up," she whispered, while her eyes were suffused with tears and her low voice trembled with emotion.

Then she laid the card in her husband's hand, and said, in a faint voice:

"Tell Marcia and Cherry to come here—Marcia will know now that I had the first right to both his love and his letters."

There were quick steps on the stairs and Edgar Harrington entered the room and approached the bed. With a sad cry of pleasure Beatrice reached out her arms.

"My son!"

"Mother!"

And they embraced as those do who are

near and dear to each other. Then Beatrice introduced her husband, but the others had vanished at sight of that tender meeting.

"Beatrice," whispered the Judge, bending over her with fond solicitude, "I was a brute; forgive me."

"You are forgiven, Richard;" she breathed the words rather than said them. "But Oh, Richard, why were you so unreasonable? You gave me no chance to defend myself, but flew to the conclusion that I was both weak and wicked."

"Why did you not tell me from whom you received those letters?"

"You never asked me. Besides, Richard, I supposed you had not forgotten my foster-son since I had told you before our marriage of his existence."

"I was a brute; forgive me," reiterated her husband.

Marcia, to whom the past months and even years were as a mist seen through her strange mental eclipse, had explained as well as she could, and with Cherry's help, the

means by which she had come into correspondence with Edgar Harrington. The mystery of the handwriting was still a mystery, when young Weir—Rob—gave his penitent testimony with the excuse that he had carried on in a spirit of fun that which had at first been a matter of business. There was a great deal of mutual embarrassment over the affair, but Beatrice with the native tact of a good heart, called them to her and soon managed to set them all at ease. Rob was forgiven as he earnestly expressed his contrition, and Edgar and Marcia, so strangely acquainted were naturally led to discuss matters with considerable freedom. The result was that Edgar Harrington without overestimating himself soon discerned that he already possessed an interest in the eyes of a young lady who was a most attractive study to his restless nature and who challenged a reciprocity of sentiment by a mute intelligence of her love.

Edgar Harrington was not informed of the Judge's pique and jealousy. Beatrice—true wife—would not so belittle her husband

in the eyes of another man. So Richard Marsden was compelled to hear his wife's virtues lauded to the skies by the young man who had the devotion of a son with the ardor of a lover. Describing her own goodness to him during his wayward youth, he said :

"I have even been glad that I never knew the mother who bore me for she must have suffered by comparison with her who saved me from myself and my evil companions and made a man of me."

Major Krum received a brief note from the Judge asking him to come to the house. Wondering, he went and found strangers present. He saw a young lady he did not know walking about the room, and said to Cherry with a motion of his hand.

"Interjuce me."

A peal of laughter from Cherry was his answer; he stared in amazement.

"Why it be Marsh, our Marsh. Doan' you know her, Maje?"

"Marcia! Miss Marcia! well, and like this?" inquired the astonished Major. "Whose miracle is this?"

"Stepmother's," answered Miss Cherry promptly.

A frown crossed the face of Edgar and he looked sternly at the wild girl who thus disrespectfully alluded to his dearest friend.

The Major stood staring at Marcia who recognized him as one of the people belonging to her dream life; he had changed so much since she had been in the habit of seeing him every day that he hardly appeared like the same person. Since he had abandoned his drinking and carousing life and entered upon a new estate of honorable manhood, he looked a very different man from the blasé, seedy Major of the old days. As he stood alone among them all a forlorn look crossed his face, and Marcia, seating herself on a divan by the low window beckoned to him to sit beside her. He blushed, stammered and obeyed.

"Tell me," she said in a voice that was deliciously sweet and soft to him, "Was it with you, Major, that I went to places where there was dancing and music, and

the stars shone over our heads, and the people were all shadows?"

"It was with me, Miss Marcia, just as you've been going ever sence you were a leetle tot of three years."

"Then I haven't dreamed it all; but you have been away from me so long, and I was so ill and weak, and now I am strong and well. Did she do it—the new—papa's new wife?"

"Yes; and Miss Marcia, she is an angel! We must be very good, very kind to her. I'm afraid she hasn't been so very happy heah."

"I have taken all her strength away from her, but it will come back, she says, and, Oh, Major, the gentleman father is talking to, is her own dear son."

"Hem! A northerner, grim and stiff enough," said the Major, shortly.

"I think he is a very handsome gentleman!" answered Marcia and then she colored suddenly and was silent.

"D——n him!" muttered the Major, under his breath, casting savage glances at

the unconscious object of his jealousy. He was not sure that he was willing to exchange this "rare and radiant maiden" for the sallow invalid who had ruled him with a rod of iron. He had been so indispensable to the sick girl with her strange fancies and mysterious malady that it was hard to find his occupation gone.

"Cherry says he is an editor," he remarked suddenly; he had been jealous, too, of that unknown correspondent.

"I do not know," answered Marcia pressing her hand to her forehead. "Perhaps it will all come to me again, but what they tell me I have done and what I have been, seem all a dream compared to what I am now."

"Is that your sister Cherry talking to that youth—that—that demuah girl with the becoming blush? Miss Marcia, will we all be turned into mice when the clock strikes twelve?"

Here Cherry joined them, her pretty, piquant face aglow with a rosy pink tinge that was bewitchingly attractive, and her

bright eyes veiled with a saucy shyness infinitely becoming.

"Marsh," she whispered, "*he* says," indicating Rob with a toss of her small head, "that he likes rude, ignorant gyrls jest like me, an' that he kin teach me a heap."

"He'd better learn something himself," snarled the Major, glowering at Rob, who had been making himself agreeable to Cherry for the past half hour. "As if it mattered anything to him what you know or don't know."

That evening the letters which Rob had written in Edgar Harrington's name to Marcia were burned in the presence of the entire family excepting Beatrice, who was yet too weak to sit up. Rob was spared the misery of hearing them read, it was bad enough to account for their authorship.

Marcia had actually been "conjuhed," as Mammy said, but the spell was not that of the hoo-doo but of ill-health and a peculiar morbid condition of the mind. The will of her stepmother, educated by science and controlled by Christian belief, had at last

loosed the bonds which held her in such firm thrall. She was saved from all the unhappy influences which had dwarfed and narrowed her life almost since her birth. There seemed but one thing lacking, that was gratitude—first to God, through whose help Beatrice had broken the spell, and next to her stepmother herself who had so faithfully worked to save her. Before she slept that night she did go to her with a pleasant “good-night,” but something appeared to hold her back from a free offering of the love which was beginning to dawn in her heart, but was too new and strange for expression.

That night the sisters slept in each others’ arms. Some indefinable impulse seemed to awake in each a longing for a more loving communion than had hitherto marked their intercourse, though there had never been an estrangement between them. The two young men had insisted upon returning to the uncomfortable little tavern that was the sole hotel the place boasted of. Judge Marsden had urged them to stay

under his roof, but he felt somewhat bitterly that Edgar Harrington was not his friend, that the younger man read his weak and faltering nature with less consideration than he would have accorded to a more vigorously sinful man. So with a feeling of actual relief he saw the two off and returned to his wife to make what tardy atonement he could for his late unkind suspicions. Beatrice was sleeping lightly, her face was pale and composed and wore a look of peace as if some great weight had been lifted from her soul. The Judge read for some time, and was then preparing to retire when a fearful sound broke the stillness of the night—the mournful, dismal, prolonged wail of a hound!

The cold perspiration broke out on the Judge's face as he relaxed that listening tension and exclaimed.

“It's nothing but a dog howling. Confound the brute. I've half a mind to go out and shoot it.”

At that moment a fumbling hand rattled the lock of the chamber door.

"Who are you and what do you want?" asked the Judge in melo-dramatic tones. There was more ditchwater than heroic blood in his veins.

"Open de do', Jedge; 'foh God I'se done scared to deth."

"Mammy!" exclaimed the Judge, throwing the door open valiantly. "What in the world do you want?"

"Lawd a massy, Jedge, yoh heah dat orful noise?"

"Why, Mammy, I'm not deaf. I heard it fast enough."

"An' yoh doan' know what dat means?"

"Yes, I do; it means that old Brandy had a supper that disagreed with her, or no supper at all, or else its 'possum up a gum tree, 'coon in de holler,' as you folks say."

"No, taint, Jedge, that there is an orful sign. Doan' yoh nevah heah tell 'bout de hounds howlin'? Dere'll be a deth in de family, Jedge, suah as yoh bawn."

"Of course, Mammy," answered the Judge, preparing to close the door. We'll all die if we live long enough. That's all it means."

"No sah, it am a solemn warnin'. When my ole man died de houn's howl all night, and when little Pete died dere was one came right undah de winder and little Pete he riz up and say, 'Wha' dat noise, Mammy, dat Gabrillas trump?' an' dat blessed chile die dat next mornin'. You doan' gwine dis-yemembah dat, Jedge."

"Mammy," called the gentle voice of Mrs. Marsden, "come in, I want to speak to you."

Mammy was undressed, in a white short gown and petticoat, and her head was bound up in a white turban, but she paced stolidly in and drew near to the bed. The most prominent features about her were the whites of her eyes which seemed to protrude from her head, and she shook like one in an ague fit.

"Sit down," said her mistress, pointing to a space near her on the bed, "and tell me, Mammy, if you really believe that the good Lord would send a message to any of His people by the howl of a dog."

"I done gwine to question Him will,"

answered Mammy, wagging her head obstinately. "I know what I seed wif my own eyes."

"But, Mammy let me explain to you," and Beatrice laid one hand—how white and transparent it was—on the clasped black hands of the old servitor, "the dog howled because we were up late, or he saw the moon, or some unusual noise disturbed him; not because he was to give a death-warning to any one. Think again, Mammy, would He send word by the mouth of a dog?"

But Mammy had gone to too many camp-meetings and was too well grounded in her own peculiar theology to be disconcerted by any such reasoning.

"I ain't hearn my Bible read for nothin' all these yeahs, Miss Marsden," she answered with solemn emphasis. "If de Lawd He done ride inter Jusylem on de colt of an ass He done send His message by de howl of de houn'."

Beatrice smiled, but it was a sad, sad smile. Her white lips betokened exhaustion, and as the old black woman, who had

nursed generations under that very roof, looked at her, some touch of pity and human kindness for the woman she considered an interloper, came into her prejudiced caste-bigoted heart.

"Yoh done go to sleep now, Missis Marsden; de Jedge he gwine down to shake up dem dogs an' make 'em 'have 'emselves. You'se white an' tired now enuff foh one day."

"Mammy," said Beatrice, sitting up suddenly in the bed, "can't you love me a little as you did your dear Miss Clyffe?"

"H-u-sh-h," answered the old woman, in a sepulchral voice; "it am drefful onlucky to speak of dead folks after de sun gone down. Go to sleep, chile; I declah you look like you seed a ghostess."

"Good-night, Mammy," said the Judge, as he came in. "Your corn-cake will be heavy if you don't get some sleep."

"Goo'nite, chile," and Mammy went leaving her first benediction for the new mistress.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RESPITE.

Beatrice was again able to take her place in the household, and now began that ideal life which she had so often pictured of a family circle in which there was no inharmonious element. Edgar Harrington and Rob—whose bond of friendship was cemented closer than before by the adverse circumstances which had so nearly estranged them—left for their field of labor, each bearing in his heart a new, sweet hope that would eventually blossom into a glad fruition. Both had confided in Beatrice—Edgar with the sacred confidence that a man gives to his best and dearest friend, in a trembling fear of disapproval; Rob, with the consequence and bravado of beardless youth that is always confident of moving mountains. He was going to open a “school of correspondence” with one

pupil. Together they would conjugate the verb "to love." And at that very moment Cherry was trying to write from a copy of Rob's setting—her pretty head on one side, her front finger inked to the first joint, but resolutely intent upon conquering her "ritin'" lesson. I honestly believe Rob would have preferred her without any "book learning" whatever, but he knew he must respect the prejudices of the age in which he lived.

Edgar Harrington did not speak to Marcia upon the subject uppermost in his thoughts. He knew that it would be a shock to her dawning intelligence in the matters of practical life, and he also divined with the jealous eyes of a new passion that Marcia was already beloved. When he had talked with Beatrice he felt more secure, and also more determined to bide his time. So far he had loved but one woman—he had asked no other love than this to crown his life—he had never believed that his heart could be moved by a deeper devotion. But he knew it now.

Since he had met this strange southern girl, he looked into her soul with clairvoyant eyes and found his mate. And that knowledge rendered his filial love for Beatrice still deeper and more enduring.

Out of its ashes of wreck and ruin Clyffe House emerged, like the fabled bird of eastern legend. The county people crowded its doors again and found a gracious, modern hospitality dispensed in place of the old-time conviviality that wrought only ruin. "The Judge" was no longer a misnomer for Richard Marsden. His friends talked of running him for congress, an honor he was able to decline with thanks. Now, that all the tiresome discords of his domestic life had ceased, he felt that he might be able to enjoy the changed situation of affairs and take life easy. He had some trifling compunction about allowing his wife to spend so much of her own money, but, after all, she knew that he was a poor man when she married him. He was really grateful to her, and he loved her—as much as such a man *can* love any

body but himself—better than he had ever loved any one else. He thought all the worry about the children the sheerest nonsense, but as long as it had come out all right, and it pleased Beatrice, he was satisfied. But his standard was not Excelsior. When he met the Major—busy, sober, looking up business and really making a brave fight for the right—he wondered to himself if they were not both happier under the old regime of an empty larder and a convivial bout. Once he asked significantly:

“Ever hear the story of the man who held the hay so high his sheep starved?”

“No; don’t see the application, either, not being a sheep,” retorted the Major with spirit.

There was great wonder in all the surrounding country over the remarkable cure of Marcia. She had so long been known as afflicted with a strange, incurable malady that people had ceased to expect her recovery. When it was known that a cure had been effected without medicine, and so suddenly as to appear almost miraculous,

investigating minds demanded to know the method. Mr. Madeira, the rector, was one of the first who called. He asked Beatrice if she had been practicing witchcraft.

"As the age of miracles is past," he said, "I desire to know by what means you charm disease."

"By the simplest and most natural method known to science," answered Beatrice, "where the disease is one of those nervous disorders so common at the present time. In the days of my widowhood, to pass away time that had only sorrow for its diversion, I went to Boston and attended an institution where the new doctrine known as mind-healing was taught. I was interested in it as a special philosophical study. Much of the instruction was faulty and dangerous, but I saw pearls of great value at the bottom of tons of rubbish. The whole subject is defined in a single sentence—the triumph of mind over matter."

"I do not quite understand you, Mrs. Marsden," said the reverend gentleman,

courteously, but in the tone of polite dissent which a man invariably uses when engaged in argument with a woman. "Is it a sort of mesmeric influence you use?"

"Yes, and no," returned Beatrice. "I think, as I understand it, mesmerism is a natural gift growing out of a peculiar condition of the nervous system. The mind-cure is the result of will power. When the limbs refuse to obey the intelligence it is popularly supposed that they have lost their muscular power, but the scientists claim that it is the will that refuses to work. There is so much in imagination that people often become violently ill from purely fancied disease. They cannot control their nerves. They cannot eat or sleep, yet there is no chronic ailment. Now what they call the mind-cure is simply the effect of focusing a stronger will upon the sick person. It is as subtle and unexplainable as the atmosphere we breathe and as real and life giving. The so-called miracles of causing the lame to walk which are still occurring in foreign countries are the

result of the mind-cure and nothing more supernatural."

"Do you deny the efficacy of prayer?" inquired Mr. Madeira, with a trace of horror in his voice.

"No," answered Beatrice, solemnly; "you must feel that I do not when I assure you that my faith and life would both have been shipwrecked without that merciful relief to an overburdened soul. The name of Christian scientists which the new cure has adopted relieves it from any imputation of pagan principles."

"But why is not this famous cure more popular?" inquired the rector.

"It is one of the simple things that is used to confound the wise, and because it is so simple it is undervalued. I do not consider it an infallible system myself. I differ from the scientists in claiming that it will cure everything. It will not set broken bones or mend a severed artery. But it will cure all these strange nervous diseases, such as insomnia and prostration of the physical powers. There is a great, universal

mind—that which Emerson calls the over-soul—which regulates all systems and keeps the world balanced. I believe a universal centralization of the human mind would work the greatest results. Let me give you an instance. A great general or statesman is sick unto death with a disease that is so mysterious that it baffles all medical skill. He is given up to die. The world at large decides his fate—his days are numbered. The scientists claim that if the world—one universal mind—believed he would or willed that he should—that he at once would throw off the disease.”

“The test can never be made. It is a foolish theory, vague and impracticable,” answered Mr. Madeira. “Death is as inevitable as life; the time comes and we die.”

“But need we die before the time comes? Are we not given superior intelligence to the brutes in order that we may make the utmost of this preparatory life? I should not want to think that God could make a mistake, but sometimes it seems to me as

if it would have been better had He given reason to brutes and instinct to men, we make such poor use of the faculty."

The rector looked shocked, but he could not answer such peculiar argument as this, so he changed the conversation to the more material discussion of Marcia's late illness and its phenomenal cure. When he left one fact was uppermost in his mind, that it was the nearest to a miracle of anything he had ever known.

CHAPTER XVII.

THY KING COMETH.

Beatrice was again very ill. Truly has the poet written :

“ If thou hast crushed a flower,
The root may not be blighted;
If thou hast quenched a lamp,
Once more it may be lighted.
But on thy harp, or on thy lute,
The string which thou hast broken
Shall never in sweet sound again
Give to thy touch a token.”

The long strain and tension had been too much; a chord was broken. The strong, brave woman who had borne slight and contumely in no scant measure since the day she wedded the lover of her youth had borne up nobly under adverse circumstances only to sink upon the threshold of success. She had suffered so uncomplainingly that her husband scarcely thought her ill. He finally called upon the best doctor the little

town afforded and requested him to visit her and prescribe a stimulating tonic. The doctor, a fussy little man, who hopped like a raven and was so dark that he personally resembled one in his suit of professional black, went to Clyffe House as soon as he could find leisure and paid his respects to its mistress. He was up stairs a long time, and when he finally came hopping down he fidgeted up to Judge Marsden and motioned mysteriously to a side room. The Judge showed him in and shut the door after them.

“Nothing serious, of course?” he inquired, vaguely.

The doctor hopped nervously from one foot to the other.

“’Tis a supprise, weally—a gweat supprise, sah,” he began, in a melancholy, cracked voice. But I find youah good leddy very sick indeed, ’an it is a fac’, too, Mister Marsden, that she has not enything the mattah with her—nothing at all sah, positively no.”

“Ah,” said the Judge, drawing a long breath, “that is good news, Doctor, very

good news. How soon do you think she will be well again?"

"Nevah," said the little doctor, taking a pair of glasses from his very weak eyes and polishing them industriously.

Richard Marsden took the little doctor by the shoulders and turned him around by main force so that he could read his face. What he saw there silenced the words that were crowding to his white lips. Then he took his hat and left the house.

The little doctor wrote his prescription and went his way. His medical diagnosis was never at fault, and he knew it.

Beatrice had fallen asleep after his visit and slept a long time. It was the sleep of exhaustion and not of repose. When she awakened Marcia sat fanning her. She wore a white apron girded about her slender waist and was as hushed and watchful in manner as though she had been a professional nurse.

"Where am I?" asked the sick woman, faintly. "Who is this?"

"It is Marcia. I am here to nurse you

till you get well, mother," said the girl, kneeling beside her and taking one of her white, transparent hands in hers.

"Who calls me mother? It is not Edgar, and my child—my child who would have called me mother—lies buried far away."

"No! no!" cried the girl, sobbing bitterly, and tenderly kissing the pale, weary face on the pillow. "I called you mother—I, Marcia, your wayward, troublesome child. You are my dear, dear mother, to whom I owe so much. Oh, get well, dearest, and let me prove that I am both grateful and loving."

"I know now," said Beatrice, brushing an apparent mist from her eyes. "I was not quite awake. Yes, dear, it repays me for all to know that I have won your heart at last—at last!"

Again Beatrice rallied, and Richard Marsden was confident that his wife would soon be well, and, indeed, she improved enough to sit up and wear her pretty negligée costumes and take a renewed interest in what was going on about her. Cherry, subdued

and helpful, hung about her, but not yet had her tongue framed the word that the stepmother longed to hear—the dear and affectionate “Mother”—the title she had doubly earned. But she saw in the bright, defiant eyes a new light—that of a soul long imprisoned flashing forth its lambent fires—and she hoped yet to win the recognition she craved from her willful child.

I have shown already that music had a strange and powerful influence over Cherry, and now another great factor in the building of character had invaded her life.

“Love took up the harp of Life and smote on all the chords with might—

Smote the chord of self, that, trembling, passed in music out of sight.”

Yes, Cherry was learning the lesson of life, not to live to herself alone

Beatrice grew worse again, and rose no more from her bed. There were seasons when a great wave of despondency would roll over her spirit and almost submerge it in the disconsolate flood. It was at such a moment that, waking from a troubled

sleep, she thought herself alone, and sung over in a low, sweet voice, some of the hymns she loved, ending with one which she improvised as she sung:

“Take me to Thy arms, Master,
Thy tender, sheltering arms;
Here Thy fold is bleak and cold,
I fear its rude alarms.

“Take me to Thy heart, Master,
Thy pierced and loving heart;
Here I may no longer stay:
'Tis better to depart.

“Take me to Thy home, Master,
Thy blessed, peaceful home;
None molest that dreamless rest:
Oh, bid me quickly come!”

Cherry had been sitting at the window in the temporary absence of Marcia, and as the last faint, sweet note died away the child's soul, melted at last by the pathetic cry of a broken heart, sobbed an accompaniment, and she knelt by the bedside and laid her sunny head upon the pillow where reposed the head of the dying woman.

“Mother,” she cried, in broken accents;
“my dear, dear, mother!”

But there was no response. The girl, alarmed, called her sister, and soon the household had gathered there, Mammy endeavoring with faithful solicitude to call back the fluttering breath.

After a little she rallied and smiled lovingly upon them all.

"I am nearly home," she said, brokenly. "It is not far, nor the way long, now."

Her husband stood beside her, mute, wretched, the tears rolling unheeded down his pale cheeks. She could not lift her feeble hands to wipe them away.

The Major had taken his farewell and gone away where he could be alone with a sorrow that did him honor. Marcia leaned on Mammy's shoulder and hid her face. Cherry knelt close to the dying woman, and with troubled, remorseful gaze watched and waited for a word of recognition.

"Dere's a sound ob chariot-wheels a-com-in' ober de golden san's," said Mammy, solemnly; "an' de Lawd am dribin'. I kin hear de voices ob de angels singin' ober

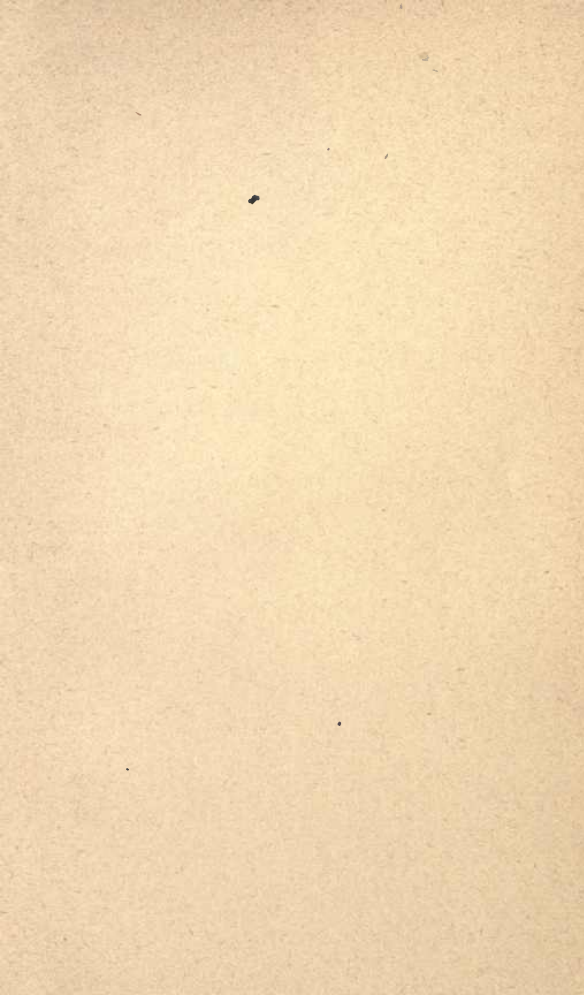
Jordan. Ole Mammy gwine soon to see 'em, bress de Lawd!"

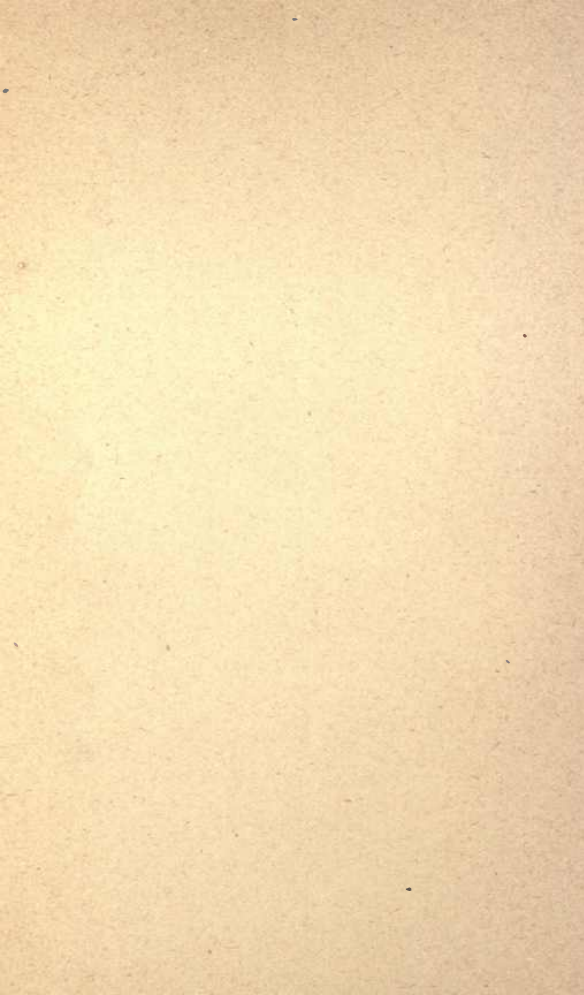
Only the sound of sobbing broke the silence. Then there was a long, restful sigh.

"Life and sorrow done,

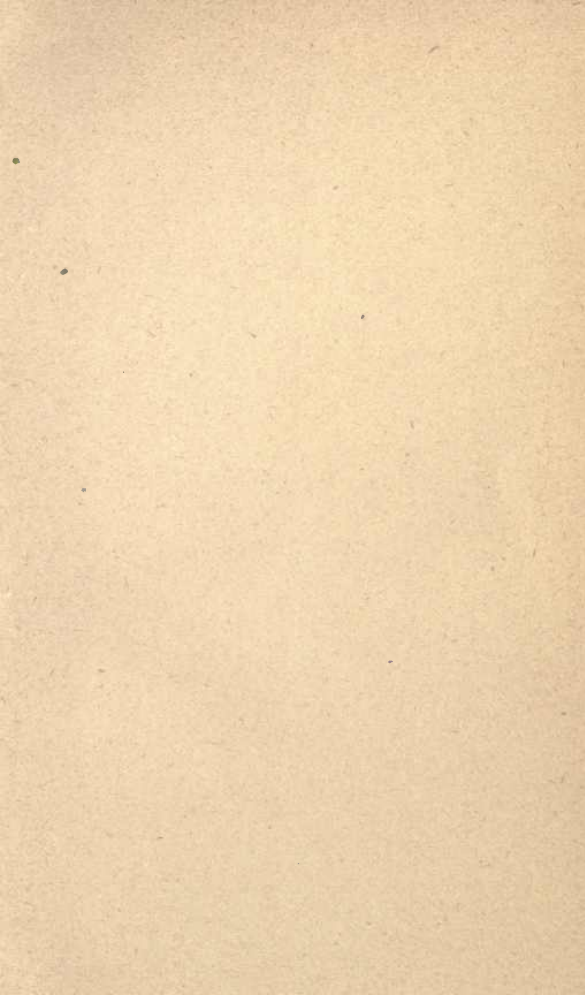
Heaven and rest were won."

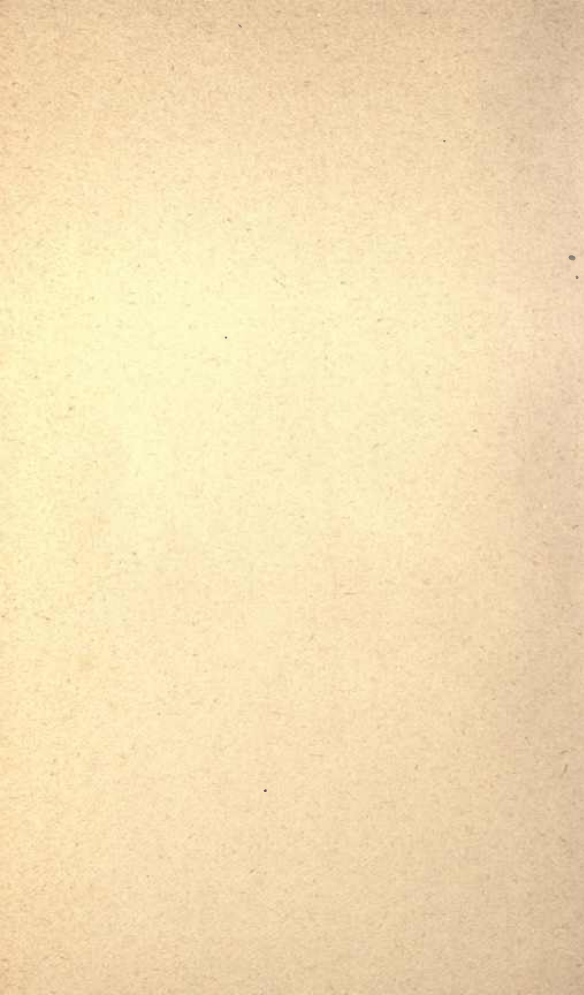
It was the last expiring whisper of "the stepmother's breath."





Q. M. Case
Superior, Wis.







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